

no 51 the magazine of cinema & television fantasy 95p

STARBURST

We interview the

BLADE RUNNER

creators, designer Syd Mead
and director Ridley Scott

Full colour reviews of
TRON and
SWORD AND SORCEROR

the first word on
STEVEN SPIELBERG'S **E.T.**



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BLADE RUNNER SCREENING

I am writing to congratulate you on a very well organised and enjoyable preview of *Blade Runner*, an excellent film, in many respects, but flawed in others. For the film, I would say that when it is tense, it is really tense, and the effects were magnificent in every respect, from the wide shots of Los Angeles itself, to the flying craft which kept soaring overhead. The plot itself was original (at least to me) and certainly made me consider how dangerous androids really could be, if they were not very strictly controlled.

As to the event itself, I have already said that it was very well organised, and the ABC Shaftesbury Ave was a smashing cinema to choose, bringing out the best of the Dolby stereo sound. Judging from the length of the queue, I doubt everyone got in, and to those who didn't I say bad luck and go and see the film as soon as it opens - it's well worth the money. The only things that surprised me was that no one got up to introduce the film at the beginning, and there were no audience reaction cards at the end of the screening for us to fill out. Not major complaints, but I was surprised at their omission.

Finally, I hope that this was just the first of many such previews. I know I shall always attend them. I suppose what I'm saying, is could you arrange one for *E.T.* as soon as possible. That's it - oh, by the way, the mag is great, and I'll always be a reader! Thanks once again.

Martin Tustin,
Horsham,
W. Sussex.

We went to say thanks to who ever it was at *Starburst* responsible for the idea of a free preview of *Blade Runner*.

In fact, we would say thanks to Philip K. Dick and Syd Mead and Vangelis and Ridley Scott, if we could, and we might even grovel a little. Even after *Star Wars* (to which we remain faithful fans,) even after staggering blindly from our third viewing of *Excalibur*, it is *Blade Runner* that remains the most intense cinematic experience of our lives.

To say it was worth woking at a quarter to six to catch the earliest possible train to London in the morning, in order to get seats, is an understatement. The atmosphere - and the people! - in the cinema before the film was incredible. Hushed, intense conversation - quite a change from sharing a half-empty cinema with a dozen or so screaming idiots. Two kids behind us talking nothing but films, films, films... we've never been to a gathering of fellow SF fans before. As for when the credits rolled - well the British premiere of *Empire Strikes Back* was never like this. (I think Ridley Scott's name found the wildest applause, with Vangelis a close second.)

As for what happened during the

stunning opening shot of Los Angeles 2020 from the air, we can't remember. I think my jaw dropped. It may be my imagination, but somewhere, someone muttered "Great scott!" under his or her breath. Never mind!

That opening sequence spoke of great things. The promise was kept. Two hours later with the superb Vangelis score ringing in our ears, we staggered out, dazed. Ridley Scott's style is densely-layered detail, image piled upon image until the artificial universe created on the flat screen begins to leak into reality. Not so far-fetched, when you spend the rest of the day in the West End. Like the characters in the film, we were shoved about, rained on, almost run down several times. Most of the people we encountered that day were foreigners - those that were native were often peroxide-headed punks in black leather... no, the only difference between the city of today and the city of the future is the height of the buildings.

Oh yes, we have to admit, now, that Brosnan is right - there were no real science fiction films before *Blade Runner*! *Star Wars* fans that we are, we admit that Harlan Ellison had a point when he called the *Star Wars* saga "bubblegum for the mind". One cannot live by bubblegum alone, indeed. Science fantasy had to grow up, eventually. Thankfully, it has turned out that science fiction is just as enjoyable.

Part of the enjoyment is superb acting. Due praise must be given the casting of Harrison Ford as Deckard, as well as excellent performances by the rest of the cast - but it was Rutger Hauer's unforgettable, tragic Replicant that stole the show in the film's terrifying climax. Only one other movie ever made me turn my eyes from the screen *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. During *Blade Runner* I hid behind my fingers twice and whimpered a lot. In other words, piling on the blood and gore, zombie-fashion, means nothing unless there is sympathy for the characters. That preview audience, in particular, should be totally familiar with scenes of Harrison Ford being knocked about brutally, so why did they keep wincing? In the end, the credit (or the blame) lies with the director.

Ridley Scott has made himself an epic, built on unforgettable sounds and images - huge buildings like vast ziggurats, the sunset over a decaying yet thriving city; built, too, on peaks of emotion and cinematic power - watch Ford lose his pig, finger by dislocated finger, on the edge of a building, a thousand levels above tiny streets... and the horrific scene where the Replicant Roy Batty meets his maker, literally, and vents his frustration upon him in a manner that is both shocking and stangely evocative...

That is film-making. That is the much-abused craft at its best.

Please excuse us for this ridiculous bout of waffling. This is the sort of letter one usually finds in *Starlog*, not our own beloved *Starburst*. There's no need to print all or any of it, so long as you provide us with a few colour stills of

Rutger Hauer - after all, there's been enough of Caroline Monro throughout past issues. So thanks, again, and good luck with any more ventures you may have in the future. Lets hope they'll be just as successful as the last one - and that the cinema's bigger.

The two young ladies who arrived in a cab on Sunday, Barnham, Littlehampton, Sussex.

A word from the Editor: "We've received a couple of letters from annoyed readers who were unable to get into the London *Blade Runner* screening. To those readers and any others who didn't get in but didn't write we'd like to say sorry! The screening was arranged on quite short notice (credit for the idea should go to Carolyn Jardine and her colleagues at Dennis Davidson Associates). The ticket page was put together in something of a hurry and contained a couple of mistakes, the worst of which was the misspelling of Dennis Davidson! With only two weeks between the release of *Starburst 40* and the date of the screening there just wasn't time to issue tickets by post. When Screen One at Shaftesbury Avenue ABC filled up we thought that was it. Those who couldn't get in were told the theatre was full. However, manager Leslie Grou and his stalwart staff came through and agreed to open up the second Screen and run the film there. Those who bore with us got to see *Blade Runner*. The second theatre wasn't quite full, so we thought that everyone went away satisfied. Not the case, as those few letters proved. To these people we apologise. Future *Starburst* screenings will be strictly ticket by post only. You learn by your mistakes! And own up to them! Again, apologies to any disappointed readers."

OOOPS!

Last month I wrote to *Starburst* criticising it in no uncertain terms. Well, the news is that you can now come off your tranquilizers and relax. Whereas I still believe my comments on certain remarks made by John Brosnan, Chris Charles and Tony Crawley, about *Dr Who* and *Star Trek*, to be true, I must take back some of the criticisms made of the magazine as a whole.

This month's edition (No. 49) was a vast improvement on those that have gone before, (to borrow a phrase). Not one mention of those dreaded Zombies and only one of George Romero (and that was only in passing). In fact *Starburst 40* was a diverse and interesting magazine covering a number of sf/fantasy films.

"Let's see something on *Tron*, *Blade Runner*, and even *Star Trek*," I said and this month... there they were. It's at times like these when you wished you'd kept your mouth shut!



You even gave us Trekkies a favourable review of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*—will wonders never cease? Having seen it myself I must agree with everything said about it. A thoroughly enjoyable piece of escapism that was everything that the first *Trek* vehicle wasn't. In fact it was so good I wondered whether I, Alan McKenzie and the rest of Fleet Street saw the same film as John Brosnan.

You'll be relieved to hear that I have very little to say about Mr Brosnan this month. After all nobody actually expected him to *like Star Trek II*. I have a feeling that he'd already made up his mind about the film before he saw it anyway. After all his cheap shots at the whole *Trek* phenomena he could hardly turn round and admit that the new vehicle was any good, now could he?

John Brosnan describes *Star Trek II* as "a banal, unoriginal and totally predictable piece of work"—the same could be said about "It's Only a Movie Starring John Brosnan". Next time Mr Brosnan wears a hat I suggest he checks it carefully to make sure there are no grub-like creatures concealed ready to wrap themselves around his cerebral cortex!

Apart from the above I thoroughly enjoyed this month's issue, (pause for sighs of relief). I hope that this standard continues in the coming months when I understand you will be changing your format yet again.

Paul Butler,
Camberley,
Surrey.

Dear Starburst

As sure as eggs is eggs, I said to myself on looking at the cover of *Starburst 40*, Brosnan will be reviewing *Star Trek II*, or else giving it a passing nod in his column. And he will not like it. He will attempt a hatchet job, liberally spiced with little jibes calculated to upset hordes of irate trekkies. Yes, unfortunately John Brosnan has become that predictable, and it is indeed a shame, as his column was once an enjoyable part of the magazine, but of late has become nothing short of smug, masturbatory exercise. For the last three issues, John as wasted valuable column inches on a personal vendetta against those miscreants who have committed the heinous sin of liking *Star Trek*.

Granted, the letter from Miss Jean Barron which seems to have sparked the whole thing off, was an over-

reaction to what was simply a humorous remark in Brosnan's column, and indeed in the following issue John acquitted himself admirably with a witty put down of Miss Barron's ire. Ah, but there's the rub! The general "ambiance" of Brosnan's column of late has suggested an attempt by the writer to become a sort of poor man's Harlan Ellison, a controversial figure, the old "writer-as-a-superstar" syndrome (the difference of course being that Ellison doesn't even have to try, his scathing honesty and his very nature make him a controversial figure). Now if John's idle remark provoked such a heated response, think of the reaction by the trekkies to an all-out, full frontal assault on their icon! His column in *Starburst 40* bore out my worst fears. "... *Star Trek*, the TV show that has done for the science fiction genre what Barbara Cartland has done for literature in general." Wow! Heavee! That oughta have those silly bitches reaching for their poison pens, eh John??? (Incidentally, two of the writers you cite in such reverential terms in that article John, namely Van Vogt, and in particular, Asimov are avid fans of the show). Unfortunately this remark will probably have the desired effect. One young lady I know has already cancelled her subscription to *Starburst*, exactly the sort of (over) reaction JB had hoped for I'll bet. Why deprive yourself of a good magazine just because one writer offends you? My initial reaction was that I hoped everyone would ignore it and John would grow bored with the whole thing and it would quickly peter out. But now the stage is set, and I can see this dragging on for a long, long time.

It's really because of the remarks about *Star Trek II* in John's column in issue 40 that I have been moved to put pen to paper. I would not classify myself as a 'trekkie' *par se*, but rather an SF fan who holds a special place in his heart for *Star Trek*, right next to Ellison, Bradbury, Sturgeon and Dick. I expected John not to like the movie, as lately his critical faculties seem to have gone to pot (I mean, the man liked *Annie for Gawd's sake!*), but the entire article reminded me of several vain attempts at a character assassination of Harlan Ellison by some incensed fans, which was printed in a *Trek* newsletter after Ellison's superb thumbs down to *Star Trek—The Motion Picture*, in *Starlog*. There was the same struggle to find fault, the same nit-picking, the same extrapolation of insignificant minutiae. I

find the criticisms of plot predictability and talk of caricatures particularly amusing, coming as it does from James Bond aficionado Numero-Uno, not to mention the author of *Skyshop*, a magnum opus beside which the plot of *Star Trek II* is a veritable Gourdian Knot and the characters positively Bergmanesque!

John then leaps with obvious glee onto the "slug-in-the-lug" incident as an example of "Neanderthal" plotting. Really John? Just use the old grey matter a little and you can come up with several good reasons why Kirk should not mistrust Chekov and Terrel (the token black as John so thoughtfully points out for all of us who may not have noticed him as "a black", token or otherwise, but just classed him as a person along with all de white folks).

The comparison of Spock's death to a scene in *The Big Bus* was pretty pathetic. The scene was directed and acted superbly and pecked a real emotional wallop. Not since James Stewart's guardian angel rang the bell on his Christmas tree, has a scene in a movie brought a lump to my throat the size of the one I had when of pointy ears snuffed it. Throughout the movie and in this scene in particular Nick Meyer displayed all the talents which made *Time After Time* such a beautiful movie, namely his expert handling of a 'people' story, and his deft manipulation of actors in an emotional situation.

The apparent criminality of having middle aged actors in the movie baffles me. When was the last time you saw a twenty-five year old Senior Surgeon, or Chief Engineer on a naval vessel, John? I must say that I agree with John that the production did have the look of a TV movie in parts, but that one minor quibble aside, I consider *Star Trek II* a taut, exciting, well produced piece of entertainment that all connected with can be duly proud of, and contrary to JB's opinion I think it bodes nothing but good for the future of good SF movies i.e. good old fashioned humanly has crept back into the SF blockbuster.

In closing, I must say that it's not the fact that John didn't like the movie that annoyed me, but the waste of precious column inches on a futile attempt at a hatchet job, from a journalist who is capable of better things. C'mon John, confound all our expectations and like E.T.
James Pauley,
Bolton,
Lancs.



FLICKERS

tim quinn
&
dicky howett





IT'S E.T.ERNAL . . !

E.T.'s rewriting the cinema history books. The wondrous new Steven Spielberg movie may have started slow — well, cool — compared with the first two American summerme time champs, but E.T. has a built-in factor that has it earning as much as three times the takes for *Rocky III* and *Star Trek II*. And that is the greatest word-of-mouth response for any movie since . . . Oh, since *Star Wars* itself. And George's title could be the next to go. With E.T. earning as much as three million dollars per day, it's fast catching up on *Star Wars*, certainly *Empire Strikes Back*, as the biggest moneymaker in world history.

It's already knocked *Superman II* out of the reckoning as the single largest opener over two weeks with a gross take of 44,809,568 dollars at 1,116 theatres in fourteen days. (That's gross all right!). After seventeen days, it had accrued an unbelievable 58,193,362 dollars . . . and after 25 days E.T. had accumulated 86,920,785 dollars. If E.T. can manage that kind of stratospheric figure in less than its first month of business — how much in a year?

For the moment, in the United States, every other film is dying in Spielberg's wake. Oh, people are going to see John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Clint Eastwood's Dykstra-assisted *Firefox*, some even pay for the absolute turkey of the summer, Hal Needham's *Megaforce* (so much for that sequel), but most admitted they'd gone in to those films only because they couldn't get into E.T.

That's one explanation of the whooping triumph of Spielberg's "little film". People are not only rushing to see it, spurred on by hype for once but a colossal amount of media attention about what has fast become an American Phenomenon, they're going back, three, four times in the same week. And again the next week . . .

E.T. FIGURES!

When movies attract as much business as they've been doing during the US summer the studios bend over backwards to shout their wares in massive

trade advertising. Rather pointless this summer as the three champs, all emanated from the same distributor, the Universal-Paramount-MGM-United Artists-UIP conglomerate. Anyway for a short period, Sylvester Stallone held the opening business crown. *Rocky III* (even better than *II*) raked in 16,015,408 dollars in four days at just 439 theatres. Next week, *Star Trek II* arrived, pulling in 14,347,221 dollars in three days at 1,621 theatres and that first wrecked *Superman II*'s three-day business of 14,100,523 dollars last year. Whichever they tried to cut it, three days vs four days *Rocky III* was the winner as it attracted bigger crowds in less cinemas. But then E.T. came along, hot from Cannes adulation, and all the slide-rules went out the window.

Now I've said this before (here and in our Fantasy Film Chart), but figures like this can never prove that one film is actually, creatively, artistically, even cinematically better than another. I report them, though, as some indication of the public's appetite (and ever increasing demand for OUR kind of films). That appetite today in America — tomorrow the world! — if for E.T. burgers!

Clint's *Firefox*, a limp, rather boring thrill, could, for instance, only generate 8,152,948 in its first three days at 881 theatres. Also opening after E.T. (tough, luck, Ridley), other biggies slide down right under the tubes. Ridley Scott's overly re-edited *Blade Runner* only attracted 6,150,002 dollars on 1,295 screens. *The Thing* opened really badly under the three-mile level at 840 cinemas and *Megaforce* . . . well, it's good that our American cousins are beginning to recognise hype for what it is . . . barely earned two-million at 1,193 houses.

Those are, I repeat, all figures for three days business. In the same period, E.T. scored another 13-million and a lot of small change!

And just to keep Steve smiling — if you can see his smile under that beard and his ever-present NASA cap — his production of *Pokeyes*, the only true little film of the summer, has been holding up extremely well, mustering a

decent 31,328,050 dollars in 24 days, about half of *Rocky III*'s knockout income.

JOHN & JOE

John Carpenter and Joe Dante are linking up to lick a favourite project of John's which he's been toying with for three years and more and could never finish his script on . . . It's the allegedly true and thoroughly bizarre story of *The Philadelphia Experiment* — an Einstein experiment, in fact, with radar invisibility carried out by the U.S. government in 1943.

The facts, if they are facts, go down like this. At the Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1943, the US Navy, on the say-so of the government, subjected a destroyer escort ship, the U.S.S. Eldridge and its crew of twenty to the most powerful electromagnetic field ever created by man.

Result: The Eldridge vanished. Appeared hundreds of miles away at sea. And then, re-appeared back at the Navy Yard, more or less intact. Which is more than can be said for the sailors. Some died. Others returned with their bodies, their actual molecular structures, grotesquely scrambled. Others were walking electromagnetic time-bombs, exploding and burning unpredictably. Others were simply, hopelessly mad.

The entire experiment took place in a matter of minutes. The truth of the matter has never been divulged by the US Navy or the government. It's quite obvious that they didn't know what happened other than the Eldridge had been hurled to the outer edge of existence, through a hole in the universe, and back again . . .

Gets you right there, doesn't it! Certainly got to John Carpenter. He started developing the story back in his *Fog-gy* Avco-Embassy Pictures days. "He got through 57 pages of his screenplay and couldn't finish it," the film's co-producer Doug Curtis tells me. "They were an incredibly exciting 57 pages. I can tell you that. Of all the subsequent screenplays, it's remained those 57 pages which have been so goddamned intriguing that you say, 'C'mon let's do this!'"

And, so Doug is doing it. When he was at Avco-Embassy, he worked with Carpenter on the project — "his day always been Embassy's biggest project." When the company was recently taken over, however, the new honchos rejected the project and Doug Curtis got it back again. "I called John immediately. 'Do you want to be involved because no one seems to have any idea about what the hell is going on but you?' And he said 'I'd love to . . . he's literally been having nightmares about the story ever since he first tried to write it.'"

So Carpenter will be the film's executive producer, and he and Curtis have signed up Joe Dante to direct it. "Soon as I saw *The Howling*," comments Doug Curtis, "I knew Joe Dante was going to be a director to watch. He's now been involved on this project for 18 months."

For the moment the group — New Pictures Group, Ltd — have a new script by William Gray and Don Jakoby, but at Carpenter's suggestion, Curtis is hoping to get Bill Lancaster to do a re-write. "He's a terrific writer," agrees Curtis. "I've read both of his scripts for *John*, *The Thing* and *Firestarter*, and he's the best there is. Particularly for a film like this . . . although you can't argue with his *Bad News Bears*, either! We should be shooting in the autumn of '83, right after the re-write, if Bill writes it. Unfortunately, he's very slow. But he's like John — meticulous. Each scene is like a screenplay in itself.

"Stephen King has always wanted to do this story too. He's never told me that but he's said it to other people. And at one point, we were even talking about him possibly doing the final screenplay. But the best news is that now John is back. He'll be primarily responsible for guiding the new screenplay. The budget has never been a problem. As independents we can make it for less than 20 million. No, the problem has always been the script. How do you make a story that is so incredible — credible?"

And true?

"Well, million of people believe it's true. We're starting to make a film that denotes this is a true story and we feel we know how to do that now. But I'm not sure I should be talking too much about that until we have the final screenplay."

Well, as long as it doesn't turn out to be another *Final Countdown* . . .

Curtis laughed. "It's amazing how many people say that. Well, no it won't be that way at all. We're using what really purports to be the facts and we'll have the best special effects people. John and Joe have already been working, of course, with the best people in that field. We might be going with the team who made the brilliant effects in *The Howling*, for example. The story is the true star of this picture, but there's still about eight people prominent in the cast — and of course, these days, special effects are cast like the actors!"

SOLO DANTE

While awaiting the final *Philadelphia Experiment* scenario, Joe Dante has been keeping his hand in with his *Twilight Zone* episode in July — and an August start-date for something called *The Movie Orgy*. Although this project is also for Filmways, it will make extensive use of library footage from American-International films. No great problem as Filmways bought up AIP some time ago. I expect some later *Comania* from his New World Pictures, will also find its way into this movie. Or re-make? It started life, you see, when Joe Dante and *Airplane* producer Jon Davison first linked up in 1966. Long before working for Corman (in his trailer-making department) they showed their gifts by tackling together a compilation movie from all sorts of exploitation films.

I think they should still keep their

original monicker for the mad result: *The All Night, Once-In-A-Lifetime Atomic Movie Orgy*.

CARPENTERBERG?

Before making his Carpenter project, of course, Joe Dante is linked with Spielberg's *Twilight Zone*. I also hear that Uncle Steve is talking script deals with Carpenter's favourite scribe of the hour, Bill Lancaster. Can it be far off then before Carpenter and Spielberg do a Lucasberger act... hhm?

KURT'S PROMOTION

Kurt Russell is going up in the world. Three of his last four movies were for his mate, Carpenter; the fourth, incidentally, was Spielberg's *Used Cars*. Now, Kurt has been elected by Mike Nichols for his highly dramatic science-fact film, *Silkwood*, based on the Karen Silkwood plutonium affair. Kurt's role? He'll be Meryl Streep's boyfriend. Rather better than chasing Carpenter's *Thing*. He's due back in Carpenter country if and when they ever saddle up with EMI for the long-delayed *El Diablo* Western.

PSYCHO II BEGINS

Well, it's come to pass... Spurred on by the nobodies and their *Return of Norman* notion, Universal has begun production of *Psycho II*. Anthony Perkins and Vera Miles, who never expected to be this lucky, top the cast as Norman Bates and Lila Crane, 22 years later. Tom Holland has scripted the sequel, and not Robert Bloch who had already mapped out a possible return to his Bate's Motel.

And who's daring to take over where Hitchcock, The Master, left off? None other than the alleged down-under Hitch, Richard Franklin, from *Road Games* and *Patrick*. Although born in Melbourne, Franklin studied at the superstar-making University of Southern California's film school. His fellow students were Lucas, Milius, Carpenter and his co-producer on *The Blue Lagoon*, Randall Kleiser. Their course included a visit to observe Hitchcock at work on the set... I hope he remembers how little blood Hitch used!

UP, UP AND AWAY III

Richard Lester began shooting *Superman III* at Pinewood studios on Monday, June 21. Although I must say it sounds rather like *Superman I* to me, Richard Pryor, as first announced here, oh, sons ago is playing the villain, Gus Gorman. Well, he starts as a buddy and finished up as Supie's pal, Pamela Stephenson in (having to keep her clothes on) in there somewhere as Loreli Ambrosia. And if that pairing doesn't sound like a re-run of Gene Hackman and Valerie Perrine as Lex Luthor (LL... now GG) and Eve Teschmacher, I don't know what is...

Better news is that despite all their bitter rows and heated threats, the Salkinds obviously settled some kind of terms with Margot Kidar. She's back in

Chris Reeves' arms as Lois Lane. But... to make sure she toes the party line, this third film reduces her role to introduce LLo's rival for old Supie. Anneette O'Toole is also in from the America to play Lana Lang. It's an improvement on her last role - a bar tender in *48 hours*.

Once again, the film will make use of certain Canadian locations (left over from *Superman II*) and the unit will also be travelling to Italy for some sequences. The new (?) script is by David and Leslie Newman, who worked on both other films. And I expect the result will be the big Christmas 1983 release, although I've not had that confirmed yet. Warner Brothers, but of course, will be releasing it world-wide - except for two areas the Salkinds keep to themselves, Mexico and Switzerland. I wouldn't mind having all the returns from just Mexico and Switzerland myself.

CARDINAL CHRIS

No Christopher Reeve movie for Christmas this year, though. Plans to release his Vatican thriller, *Monsignore*, worldwide for the holidays have been suddenly switched to February. The reason? Producer Frank Yablans simply had second thoughts and felt that a film about a cardinal with Mafia connections might not go down well with Catholics and others at Yuletide. I gather Chris agrees. He's not worried by the new date either, although it means that his switch to a man of the cloth from the man of steel will not be eligible for the next Oscar nominations.

While awaiting the start-date of *Supie III*, Chris has been shooting TV commercials for free. Well, they're special, you see. The product he's selling is accident prevention and the blurbs are made for the Will Roger's Institute. Other names chipping in are Ricky Schroder and American footballer Joe Namath.

SUPER-SHY

Berta Dominguez *D* is the wife of Alexander Salkind, an mother of lya - the Superman producers. She doesn't like to advertise the fact as she's making her own movies. She's had a big success with *Mave* about a Mexican teacher working in Harlem. She wrote, produced, codirected and starred in it under the alias Abigun Domes. She's now preparing her new film, *Where Is Persifal?* under her real name acting in her own script that is, with hopefully George Cukor directing. "I never like to trade on the Salkind name," she says. "I'd be too busy with *Superman III*. It will, though, be billed as a presentation of Alexander Salkind."

She hardly needs help from the family. She's already signed up Rudolf Nureyev to be Morjock the Mystic, Matthieu Carriere and as young Persifal himself (familiar to all Arthurian legends fans), the latest film-making member of the Chaplin clan, Christopher Chaplin. She's also talking to Lord Laurence

Oliver, Ruth Gordon and Christopher Lee. Exactly the largish plans you'd expect of a lady like Berta - a direct daughter of an assassinated president (pro-tem) of Mexico and, as she proudly adds, she's a direct descendant of Montezuma, himself. He was a hero before Superman was first inked in on the page...

BRAINSTORM BUYER?

Four Hollywood major companies have been looking over Doug Trumbull's trouble-ridden *Brainstorm* movie with a view to buying it for release - and one supposes, offering Trumbull the extra loot to finish off the effects. Word is that Paramount have the edge on Columbia, Warners and Universal in the worth, not to say, the wealth of their proffered deal. The film, you'll recall, is Natalie Wood's last, not that her accidental death ruined it but MGM seemed to think that was a good reason for simply collect the insurance loot from Lloyds of London, not to go to jail and win the Monopoly game, Trumbull had thought he was playing the film-making game. Trouble with that sport is he who holds the purse-strings changes the rules...

KING/GEORGE SALE

Well, hush mah mouth... I Within a month of returning from Cannes and reporting how George Romero and Stephen King decided at a bunch of Midi meetings not to make a *Creepshow* distribution deal with Universal in America, but release their cracking movie with their United Film backers... they've made a deal with Warner Brothers! That's for America only as so many other countries made release deals with the company at Cannes, although Warners are not on trying to pick up some of those territories as well (which could mean a handsome profit for foreign companies who bought the film for, say, France, Germany, Australia, even Britain - if anyone did have the sense to buy it for Britain!).

The deal means that *Creepshow* will now be rleased Stateside in late October instead of King-George's July plans. And upon reflection, they and the film will probably do much better that way. As mentioned, the American summertime box-office has broken all records, but only three of the big films released have found any major success. The rest have been swamped - and as an independent release, *Creepshow* might well have been among that number, which would have been bad news. What's more to the point of course, if *Creepshow* now does well, it's very much on the cards that Warners will then finance *The Stand* and that's the movie we're all waiting for, isn't it?

VID GAMES

Disney enter the home video-games field - as well as tomorrow's style of film-making - with *Tron*. The game will

have to be good based on *Ster Wars*, *Empire Strikes Back*, *Revenge of the Jedi* in the arcades and the Lucasfilm-Parker Brothers, *Raiders* game for homes. Why the film-makers' rush into this new indoor sport? Quite simply really. Last year in America, people spent more money on video games than movies... and the figure is rising. Hourly!

TREKKIES CONTD

With his terrible new tv series, *Hooker*, behind him, William Shatner is sending Kirk up higher than man has been before in the *Starline II... The Sequel* comedy. He plays Buck Murdock, chief of a lunatic's base. And as for the famous demise of Leonard Nemo, I think you can forget it. *Star Trek III*, so I'm told, will be called *The Search for Spock*.

QUICK TAKES

Under-rated American actor James Woods jumps from David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* and Debbie Harry to Sergio Leone's comeback, *Once Upon A Time in America* and De Niro. That's no jump. That's a quantum leap... David Warner, the baddy (what else?) in *Tron* joins brain surgeon Steve Martin in *The Man with Two Brains*... Ex-Bond girl Lois (Moonraker) Chiles among the new *Dallas* line-up... After Supie III, Richard Pryor joins forces with Richard Verne to send-up the Pentagon in *Ain't No Heroes*... Sigourney Weaver, so far these days from *Alien*, starts *Dial of the Century* with Chevy Chase in October... Lou Ferrigno has an Italian rival in his Hercules venture. Its called *Hercules in Blue Jeans*...

MORE ETs... ?

Michael Laughlin is an American producer who films anywhere but home. Last year, he made his directing debut with *Strange Behaviour* (ex-*Dead Kids*) in New Zealand. Then, he was trying to set up *Mesmerized* for director Jerry (Moonlighting) Skolimowski in Australia... until he found something on his sleeves that was rather more timely. It's called *Strange Invaders* and has some less than friendly ETs taking over a small mid-West township. He started shooting in August - in Canada. The script is by Laughlin (Leslie Caron's husband) and his *Strange Behaviour* writer, William Condon. They call the movie fun science fiction "like those bug-eyed monster epics of the 1950s." The antithesis of *ET*, then.

BO WINS

Six months or more after the film was released, an American appeals court judge threw out the breach of contract and copyright charges brought against Bo and John Derek's *Tarzan*, *The Ape Man* film by the heirs of Tarzan creator Edgar Rice Burroughs. Hizzoner Judge Kearse found that the 1931 license deal between Burroughs and MGM gave the studio the right to create original story about the jungle characters, that the 1932 original film was written that way,

THINGS TO COME

not based on the book at all, and therefore MGM held re-make rights to their own and not Burroughs' property. But, of course, what really up the Burroughs Estate was Bo's body being as loosely clad as Tarzan's. Hizzoner, like the rest of us, rather enjoyed those scenes! "The nudity doesn't alter the story," he reported, "but contributes to it." True enough. Minus Bo, the film would have been empty.

JUNGLE JANE

There shouldn't be any litigious trouble with the Burroughs kin on the new jungle movie called, simply, *Jane*. Don't according to writer-producer Ken Hartford. "I wouldn't be so unoriginal as to imitate Edgar Rice Burroughs," he claims. "In that case why does he call his girl stranded as like in the jungle after her parents's murder. Jane... when her name in the script is... Carolyn?"

Ah, yes, well, you see, says Hartford, when she's brought back to civilisation (having been raised, of course, by the apes... no, sorry, by the animals, it says here) she's naturally headlined Jane by the ever wicked press who have little compunction about imitating Burroughs.

Ken Hartford and his director Ross Hagan are still searching for their star of the 12 million dollar movie. They want a blonde about 5ft 8ins, 18 or 19, athletic, with a great figure. Don't we all

ENTER: N.A.D.W.A.S.

I've a new acronym for your collection. American, but of course. N.A.D.W.A.S. It stands for the North American Doctor Who Appreciation Society. Some 4,000 of its members got together at the Americana Congress Hotel in Chicago during E.T.'s summer for their second convention - which happens to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the good old Doc. Backing up the birthday was Lionheart Television International, who have rights on 41 episodes of the series and to rather wily by Auntie in fogging them around the local tv stations. They call the package deal *The Doctor Who Sci-Fi Film Festival*. Dvcht!

JAMIE'S RIVALS

Look out, Jamie-babe, the Germans have found two contenders for your terror-queen role. They prove, in fact, to be Jamie Lee Curtis' half-sisters, Allegra and Alexandra Curtis. They are the result of Tony Curtis' second marriage to the German actress, Christine Kaufman. The movie they're making is called, *Gold of Love*. The genre? Terror, what else? They're either copying *Jillie*... or simply taking a leaf out of Dad's scripts because he has been making some pretty terrible movies over the last three years. (He deserves better).

SWAP - SHOP

Lucio Fulci's 12 million dollar Italian *Conan* rip, *Siegfried's Sword*, has been cut from the Amati Productions' schedules in Rome despite all its

Cannes brouhaha. The reason, according to Edmondo Amati and his sons Sandro and Maurizio (now his partners in his 30-year-old combine) is obvious. There's too many comic sword movies a foot in Rome just now. Instead, the clan redeployed their budget into a new offshoot company to make... what else but a sequel to their *Jaws* rip-off *Great White* - released by Eagle Films in Britain as *Sherk*. James Franciscus is unlikely to return for the re-run after universal, one of his usual Film City employers, won the legal right to confiscate the Italian rip-off in America. But Enzo G. Castellari is expected to direct again, with the Bruce, Italian style, in the safe hands of its makers Giorgio Ferrari and Giorgio Pizzi.

MILES MOVIES

The death of sword movies in Rome doesn't seem to worry Miles O'Keefe, though. Anything, it seems, was better than making *Adam* and *Eve*. The ex-Tarzan walked out of that project and made it up to his Italian producers by shooting another quickie sword 'n' biceps number, rather like his *Ator*... *The Fighting Eagle*. Prancing around a studio set with both chest and buttocks as free as Adam, he's leaving to some other guy. Can't say I blame him...

CHINA RAIDERS

Most of what I told you about a past-paced thriller called *High Road To China* (Sterburst 42) has been drastically changed since tv hotshot Tom Selleck took over the lead role from Roger Moore. Several of the book's colourful characters have been cut - though not the Warizi tribe leader allowing Brian Blessed a re-run of his *Flesh Gordon* title, minus wings.

Huston Hutton (directing instead of John Huston, with Bess Armstrong in what had been Bo Derek's slated role) says the changes are because the Jon Cleary novel was too massive to fit the single movie. What he doesn't say is that the cuts are made very much with *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in mind.

Tom Selleck, as we all know (yewwwwww!) was the Lucasberger's first choice for Indiana Jones. George and Steven knew he'd just shot the *Magnum, P.I.* pilot suggested that CBS hold off shooting the series for a year as Selleck would be a hotter name when their film. No deal! Tom later lost two other movies because of the series.

Well, the script of his first massive movie (a 20 million dollar caper with Yugoslavia doubling for China, Afghanistan and Turkey) has been totally re-sprung to (a) junk all the obvious *Raiders*' connections, such as rescuing Bess' archaeologist father with the ransom of a priceless jade statuette, while (b) telescoping the plot from 18 days to 12 in order to match the speed of *Raiders*.

SELLECK ON RAIDERS

Now It Can Be Told Dept. Tom Selleck could have made *Raiders*, after all... He lost on Indy when CBS-tv refused to

postpone the shooting start of the *Magnum* series. But once he arrived on Hawaii to begin work, the actors' strike struck... "Raiders was able to keep going in Europe because of a special dispensation. But we couldn't make a movie on Hawaii. So, in fact, I could probably have done now." I thought I'd missed my shot... from now on I'd be just a tv actor, you know. I felt entitled to get something out of it, though, and kept telling people. That was my part you know!

He admits that the Lucasberger had obviously seen every other actor in town before getting around to him - but at least they had definitely wanted him. Once the movie came out, Tom's friends advised him to give it a miss figuring it'd be depressing to see what a big chance he'd missed. He went anyway and loved it like the rest of us. "It's hard to imagine anyone being better than Harrison Ford in it. He was quite wonderful. It was really his film."

So is it a tribute - or a rip-off - that for his *High Road To China* heroic role Tom has cut his hair short in a '20s-cum '30s' style, kept his Burt Reynolds' moustache... and a Harrison Ford five-days' growth of stubble...?

MAD MAX RUNS

The title proved all too true. Mel Gibson, Sigourney Weaver and the entire unit of *The Year of Living Dangerously* have fled their Manila locations for the relative calm of Australia after fanatical Muslim riots and death-theatres. Trouble started when Filipino Muslims believed that the movie - a romantic thriller set during the overthrow of Sukarno in Indonesia in 1965 - was an anti-Islam picture. That they figured, was why the film was being shot in the Philippines and not in Indonesia. They were wrong about everything but that didn't stop a riot of some 10,000 Muslims and a barrage of successive written and telephoned bomb threats. And so at the cost of 120,000 dollars, the cast and crew bolted - quick.

Director Peter (Gallipoli) Weir denies any suggestion that the fast exit was simply a publicity stunt, that the Manila locations had finished, anyway. "The threat was very real," he says... "that same kind of unpredictability and conviction that we saw in Iran. I was scared."

So was everyone else. Mel Gibson said he kept getting unnerving phone calls asking him, "Are you a brave and courageous man, Mr Gibson?"

OBITUARY

Curt Jurgens, 69, dead from a series of heart attacks in Vienna on June 18, is the first of the 007 villains to have died since the series began twenty years ago. He's certainly the only one buried in an Austrian grave of honour close to the tombs of Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Mozart and Strauss (Johann). Jurgens played Karl Stromberg, kidnapper of nuclear subs, and cause of the world's biggest soundstage at Pinewood for the ninth (official) Bond outing, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, in 1977.

Conceived, as he loved to relate, at

the Imperial Russian Court at St Petersburg (where his mother was French teacher to the Russian royal), the Munich-born Curt Gustaf Anders Gottlieb Jurgen Jurgens starred in more than 160 Euro and Hollywood movies, including *I Am at The Stars* (1960), J. Lee Thompson's biopic on German rocket designer Wernher von Braun without whom Neil Armstrong could never have made his giant leap for mankind on the lunar surface. Although he inevitably played numerous Nazis on-screen, Jurgens had been thrown into a concentration camp for "political undesirables" by Goebbels in 1944. After the war, he became a naturalised Austrian, a collector of beautiful homes (six) and wives (five) and published his autobiography when aged *Sixty And Not Yet Wise*.

That went for his heart condition, too; all his final films, including the Bond, were made against his doctors' advice. His funeral could have been staged by the 007 designer Ken Adam - 15,000 people attended the torchlight procession at night. (Before you send off any missives, the late Robert Shaw and Lotte Lenya weren't major villains, but henchmen killers in their Bond flick *From Russia with Love*, DK7).

Robert E. Gottschalk, 64, founder of Panavision and inventor of most important film-making cameras since the war, was found murdered in the master bedroom of his Bel Air home in June. (Laos Chuman, 27, said to be Gottschalk's house-guest for two years, was later charged with the killing.) A Chicago-born maker of sports, Gottschalk was a pioneer in shooting in 16mm Kodachrome and blowing his frames up to 35mm Technicolor. He formed his first company in 1949, and was soon inventing a free-moving underwater camera for his deep-sea work. When Cinemascope arrived in 1953, he formed Panavision to design anamorphic projection lenses. His Panavision 65 system was first used by William Wyler on *Ben-Hur* in 1959 and five years later came to half of all Hollywood films were using his equipment. He then spent six years perfecting his Panaflex camera, small, lightweight, very mobile and above all, quiet (no more than 28 decibels). It was hailed as the most advanced camera in the world and Steven Spielberg used it first on *The Sugarland Express* in 1974. Next came the Panaflex which director Sydney Pollack called "probably the greatest breakthrough since the camera came out of its sound-enclosed box."

E.T. ENCORE...

And the latest E.T. success news I have is that it's constant hold-overs around America mean a delay at Los Angeles' prestigious Cinema Dome cinema for Universal's next release... Kevin Brownlow's reconstruction of Abel Gance's 1927 masterpiece, *Napoleon*, in a mint 70mm six-track Dolby sound (for Carmine Coppola's score) print. Somehow I think that Gance, the greatest innovator the films ever knew, would have approved of the delay...

IF YOU'RE FRIGHTENED BY THE UNKNOWN . . .
WAIT UNTIL YOU FACE REALITY!



CANNES CUTTINGS

Add one more to the *Conan* syndrome. Sandy Howard's production of *The Primitives* to be directed by Fradida Francis in Yugoslavia's great ancient caves of Postnoma . . . Lorimar, the Dallas-makers, are into a son-of-*Trojan* video games fantasy, *Star Fighters* with "the most incredibly innovative computer-simulated special effects," says boss man Larry Sugar. They'll have to be good, Sugar, to beat *Trojan's* . . . Michael (Wolfe) Wadleigh's big sf film, *Mirror Man*, starts this winter with a premiere planned for Springtime, 1984 . . . Herman Cohen, of *I Was A Teenage Werewolf* memory, has bought a chiller called *Watch Me When I Kill* . . . But Herman's also wooing the chop-suey market with *The Steel Fisted Dragon* starring who else but Steve Lea (*Steve 711*) . . . David Carradine headlining the Halloweenish *Trick or Treats* opposite *The Fury's* Carrie Snodgrass . . . David's ax-old lady, beautiful Barbara Hershey has joined the Apollo astronauts' movie, *The Right Stuff* . . . Last I heard about her love-life, she was living with *Blade Runner* co-writer Hampton Fancher. Maybe she still is. Both his 'n' her films are Alan Ladd productions, you see . . . Good to have friends at court.

Like their heads—which he embalms and then hides from gendarmes' sight inside his more acceptable hunting trophies in the billiards room. Trouble is he tands to keep the torsos in the fridge Careless!

Jack Taylor, a regular in the Jess Franco movies, heads the Spanish cast which makes no overtures to the outside world by trying to similarly anglicise monikers. They're called Mirta Muller, Claudia Graby and Juan Meseguer and they're quite happy about it. Pedro Camacho did the make-up. He's no Tom Savini. But he's showing promise. From little acoms, etc.

ZIMBABWE MOVIES

My prize for quite the worst Cannes brochure aimed at either the media or money-men goes to producer Geoffrey Rose's amateur comic-book effort pushing a serious (I'm told) movie called *The Secret of Planet Earth*. Why Rose chose to make his live-action film look, first of all, like an animation venture is beyond me. On top of which, give these colour daubings of a five-year-old chimp, his publicity outfit make it seem an asinine animation venture. This could because (a) Rose wasn't looking for backing, he's making the movie himself with his own cash and in (b) Salisbury, Zimbabwe! That's where he has his own studios . . . first utilised for his film of *Tuxedo Warrior*, also directed by Andrew Sinclair. That film worked out fine; very fine. This new one . . . who knows after such a made pre-sales campaign.

Designed as a 10 million dollar project (so the brochure must have cost 45p), the movie is a scientific fantasy connected with the famous magnetic line which apparently can be drawn between such ancient global ruins as Stonehenge, Easter Island, the great Pyramid and the Wall of China, among others. Our heroic trio aim to drive rubic spikes into the exact centre of these sacred places, complete an acupuncture of the earth's navel and thereby restore long lost magnetic, holy forces (by which migrating birds fly straight lines over zillions of miles). They unleash more than magnetism. The golden helmeted lost race of Zimbabwe, for example. (I bet they're news to Robert Mugabe).

BRITISH JAWS

America has *Jaws*. Now comes the British reply *The Pike*. No, not the twarp from *Dad's Army* . . . nor a fishing special for video, but a big movie about a bag fish. It's based on the book (now out in Hamlyn paperbacks) by Steve Twemlow. He's worked on the script with Gus Ramsden and will have a role in the movie as well. (Steve also acts in the film of his *Tuxedo Warrior* book). To jazz up the movie, I gather producer Kris Dillinger is chatting up Joan Collins. I doubt she'll have the time inbetween finishing *Nutcracker* and returning to Tellypapland for *Dynasty*. Always worth the asking, though . . .

It sounds something right up Spielberg's street. At least it sounds much better than those cartoons imply (I hope).

SPANISH SHOCKER

Having done so well with the World Cup staging, Spain is making greater effort at filmmaking too. Or, to put it another way, Juan Piquer Simon is no longer directing everything. A certain Francisco R. Gordillo, for example, is responsible for *The Trap* . . . which is not the 1946 American cheapie known over here as *Murder At Malibu Beach*, not the French sex-thriller of 1958, nor even Richard Widmark's 1959 thriller released hereabouts as *The Baited Trap*, and nothing to do with Oliver Reed's Canadian fur-trapping number for Rank in 1966. Popular title, huh? It's a new creeping (wall imping) ghoulin number about a falla in dark, not to say black, glasses and orthopaedic shoes who makes a habit of inviting tasty young damsels down to his Riviera hideaway and never, as it were, latting them go. He likes souvenirs of his kills, you see.

When I got home, in a state of battle fatigue, I found posters all over my little French ville for *Jour de Sang*. Sounds a good movie, I thought. (Shows you the state I was in—there's no cinema in my town). The *Day of Blood* notices were about the visiting blood donor brigade. I thought of giving some—if they'd agree to send it to Pete Walker. With that 276-year-old cast, he might just need some.



HOMECOMING II

★

the watcher in the woods



This, the new Disney feature, has a somewhat troubled production history behind it which accounts for the belated release some two years after its completion. Various stories regarding the problems have surfaced, all commenting on the ending of the picture. Apparently the original conclusion featured an alien planet and beings which were so poorly executed that they drew hoots of derision from American audiences and the movie was pulled from circulation somewhat rapidly.

Whatever the full and correct story is, what we are interested in here is the final version, not the saga surrounding it. I'm happy to report *The Watcher in the Woods* is actually not bad at all and brings back happy childhood memories of such other Disney items as *The Moonspinners*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Pollyanna* and others which always seemed to star a pre-pubescent Hayley Mills. *Watcher* is no classic to be sure, but remains lights years ahead of those awful films with the *adult* in mind, *The Black Hole* and the horrendous *Night Crossing*. *Watcher in the Woods* is actually a children's Disney film, something the studio have had variable success with over the years.

Watcher is quite a conglomeration of genre trends. It starts out as a haunted house yarn and rapidly moves through possession, mystery, apparent prowler on the loose and ends up as science fiction! Surprisingly this mish-mash of ideas actually works and thanks to the script by Brian Clemens, Harry Spalding and Rosemary Anne Sisson *Watcher in the Woods* provides 90 minutes of interesting if undemanding entertainment. It's a complex story and with Brian Clemens involved occasionally reminds one of *The Avengers* and other Clemens pieces like *Captain Kronos*, *Vampire Hunter*, with its plot twists and surprises.

Basically it's the story of an American family, with Mom and Dad played by Carroll Baker and David McCallum and their two children, 17 year old Jan (Lynn-Holly Johnson) and 10 year old Ellie (Kyle Richards), who rent a rambling mansion from the mysterious Mrs Aylwood (Bette Davis) for the Summer. Within minutes of moving in odd things start to happen. Mirrors and windows crack mysteriously and Jan starts seeing the image of a girl in various parts of

the house and neighbouring woods. Along with this is the revelation that Mrs Aylwood's daughter Karen disappeared without trace some thirty years previously. To give more of *Watcher's* plot away would be unfair, as much of the unravelling of the mystery and its sf denouement provides a good proportion of the film's entertainment values.

Under the steady hand of John Hough, *Watcher in the Woods* is never less than interesting although a couple of the performances let the film down along the way. Young Kyle Richards displays a great deal of stridency in her performance and there's a touch of the typical Disney brat about her, a little like Kevin Corcoran in such Disney pics as *Toby Tyler*. Ian Bannen as John Keller also goes over the top from time to time and Baker and McCallum barely have time to sketch in the important parent figures. Although she actually has very little screen-time, it is Bette Davis who dominates the film, bringing a real touch of sadness to the woman who has never known the fate of her missing daughter. She gets some good competition from the very pretty Lynn-Holly Johnson, last seen in *Ice Castles*, and should Ms Johnson be blessed with the right parts, she could be an actress to watch in the future.

There's a marginal love interest for Johnson in Benedict Taylor, although his part seems, along with several other scenes, to have hit the cutting room floor in the studios, effort to make the film more comprehensible and tighter.

Watcher in the Woods definitely has a few scares in stores, and though I'm overly susceptible to such technical exercises, there's at least one shock that lifted the preview audience out of their seats en masse. Director Hough was responsible for *Legend of Hell House* some years ago and the still unreleased minor masterpiece *Incubus*, so he knows what he is doing with the horror and haunted house elements and for the most, these work pretty well, providing gentle thrills for most of the time. However the ending is a little wanting and the special effects are just plain dull, but then given the problems attached to the climactic sequence, I guess we are lucky to see *Watcher* at all.

Worth seeing as a genre film and the two ten year olds in front of me were gripped throughout. Maybe it's the first horror film for children ☉

This spread: A selection of scenes from the Disney thriller, *Watcher in the Woods*.



Review by
Phil Edwards



The Sword & the Sorcerer

Well, this is more like it. Producer Brandon Chase, responsible for that recent delight *Alligator*, has hit the jackpot again with *The Sword and the Sorcerer*, a film that has more honest thrills and excitement than the severely disappointing *Conan the Barbarian*. Conan's ponderous heavy handed neo-Germanic approach gets the allow bars as Chase and director Albert Pyun opt for maximum involvement and pure absurdist escapism. And it cost a fraction of *Conan's* budget too! Here the film-makers use that to their advantage making up in sheer verve and charm what it lacks in all other departments. But then that's a mark of a good exploitation film and *The Sword and the Sorcerer* is one of the best examples of its type. It never cheats the action audience it is primarily aimed at: it takes ideas you've seen a million times before and makes them seem fresh and original. Above everything else, it is sincere and that is one of the most important attributes of all. To say that *The Sword and the Sorcerer* succeeds on every level is praise enough but what I hadn't expected was how intentionally hilarious it proved to be. Letting the audience share the absurdity of it all is a dangerous line to tread but here it works to great advantage. You really do laugh along with it all the way so much so that I haven't enjoyed myself in a film like this for ages... come to think of it, not since *Alligator* in fact.

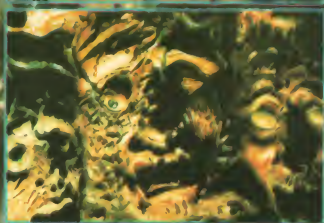
Review by
Alan Jones

The Sword and the Sorcerer is a demented fairytale that achieves a pantomime ambience as it tells of double-cross and double-cross in the Kingdom of Eh-dan. King Richard's green and peaceful land has fallen to the evil Cromwell of Aragon (Richard Lynch), who has elicited the help of a resuscitated sorcerer Xusia (Richard Moll). The opening sets the mood for the entire film as we see the long dead sorcerer rise from a bubbling tomb of blood encrusted with the living screaming disfigured faces. The King's son, Talon (Lee Horsley), has escaped the massacre of his family and returns eleven years later to find himself embroiled in a plot to overthrow Cromwell organised by the rebel Prince Mikah, (our very own Simon MacCorkindale) and the beautiful Princess Alana (Kathleen Bell). Talon is the kind of hero who is straight out of the Errol Flynn swashbuckling mould. No task is too great. No odds too insurmountable. He's the sort of demi-god who thinks nothing of battling singlehandedly against Cromwell's army knowing full well he will walk away the victor. In an uneven cast, Lee Horsley plays the sardonic Talon with gusto and makes near ludicrous moments, like when he denounces himself from a wooden cross, perfectly acceptable. While laughing at how ridiculous it all actually is, you are willing him to escape so he can save the Princess. Pitched at that level the film rarely fails and elevates itself to near-classic status. If a back to the fine line act aim that *The Sword and the Sorcerer* tightropes with so much ease. A mention too for Richard Lynch, one of my all-time favourite villains who is so sadly underrated, and who once again gives a marvellously venomous performance.

The Sword and the Sorcerer has everything anyone could wish for. A lush score that is one of the best to grace a B-movie in years. Lots of half-naked nubile young girls - and men, and violence of an unprecedented proportion for an AA certified movie. Congratulations to the censor for realising *The Sword and the Sorcerer* is really just a frantically paced harmless adventure story for all ages. There are some tremendous special make-up effects provided by Greg Cannom and the suitably named Make-up Effects Lab of Hollywood. There are burns, whip marks, heads crushed, hearts ripped out of chests, the torturer's head pulped by a grindstone and best of all the final transformation of George Maharis into the evil Xusia. Eat your heart out James Earl Jones! Another excellent effect is seen in the final swordfight where both protagonists were wired up with high-voltage weapons that spark on contact. Yet another marvellous visual highlight in a film chock full of surprises and moments like that. All this wizardry was achieved for the modest sum of 800,000 dollars. Cannom really does deserve a better credit than the small mention he receives at the end of the film. Extraordinarily the film was shot entirely in Los Angeles augmented by stock footage for location plating due to various planned matte paintings not being up to scratch.

I was genuinely impressed by *The Sword and the Sorcerer*. It isn't the greatest film ever made of course, although I have possibly made it sound like that. But it comes as such a pleasant surprise to see something of this nature crammed with flair and imagination which is so unpretentiously enjoyable that I feel like championing it in the hope that it will be a massive success for Rank who are astutely distributing it here. Also I want to see the further Talon adventures promised in the end credits. *The Sword and the Sorcerer* is everything *Conan the Barbarian* ought to have been - John Wood, so well hang your head in shame.





The Plague Dogs





Review by Phil Edwards

After the joyous return to classic animation in Don Bluth's *The Secret of NIMH*, *The Plague Dogs* brings one back to earth with a dull thud. Based on Richard Adams' best selling novel of the same name, *Plague Dogs* is a long winded and generally unpleasant full-length animated feature about a couple of pooches who manage to escape from an animal research station and find themselves hunted down mercilessly. To a rousing "ole time religion" end title song by Alan Price they (dog) paddle off to certain death in the sea.

Call me heartless, but I'm one of those few people who found Adams' early work *Watership Down* virtually unreadable, so much so that I couldn't bring myself to see the film version, produced by the same people who have brought us the film currently under review. Even Art Garfunkel's title song and top twenty hit *Bright Eyes*, failed to move me.

Just who this film is aimed at is quite beyond me. The opening scenes in the labs where the dogs are put through harrowing tests in the "name" of science are far too nasty for young audiences and the entire film is so downbeat it really does auger the question, "Why was it made at all?"

The animation is lifeless, the landscapes attempting to capture some of the tone of Turner without any of the feeling and the animation of the main characters make recent Disney efforts look like masterpieces.

If *The Plague Dogs* is aimed at adult audiences then they have missed the boat also. The whole thing presents such a miserable view of humanity that even as a piece of anti-vivisection propaganda it doesn't work. With "Author's Message" stamped over every frame from the opening on, *The Plague Dogs* is heavy going. I guess we'll just have to wait for Richard Williams to complete *The Thief* (in production for over twelve years!) or for Don Bluth to make another masterpiece like *NIMH* before we can seriously consider that the full-length animated feature is not a dying art.



This spread: A selection of scenes from the animated film *The Plague Dogs*.

basket case

Review by
Alan Jones

Started in 1978, Fred Henenlotter's labour of love, *Basket Case*, looks like becoming the cult horror film of 1982. It has everything stacked against it on first appraisal: the lowest budget seen in years, some of the worst acting imaginable, harshly lit interiors reminiscent of the cheapest porno movies, grainy blow-up from 16mm and other shoddy technical credits. It shouldn't work at all, but amazingly it does and exceptionally well too.

The plot is a variation on the theme put forward by Brian De Palma's *Blood Sisters* and it is this central focus on the ties between Siamese twins that maintains the interest and gives the film considerable merit.

Deformed Belial is separated from his fully developed twin, Duane (Kevin Van Hentenryck), and is condemned to die by their father and the three doctors, two of whom are veterinarians, performing the operation. But telepathic brotherly love saves Belial from a garbage disposal death and together—Duane carrying him in a basket—they head for a sleazy Times Square hotel where they formulate plans for revenge on the doctors responsible for their plight. Belial is incredibly strong and dispatches the assorted victims either by slashing their faces with his claw-like hands and breaking their bodies in two, or, the most amusingly macabre of the lot, splitting their father in half by means of a circular saw. The undercurrent of humour throughout the film makes these gory deaths all the more palatable although in one instance, where the last doctor gets her face rammed into a drawful of scalpels, the impact is lessened by lingering too long on the aftermath.

I can't say there is any real suspense generated mainly because the Belial character is made so sympathetic, and the victims so odious, that you're on the twins' side from the start. Belial is a rather remarkable prosthetic make-up

effect created by John Caglione Jr. and Kevin Haney, the latter's *Altered States* credit obviously being a key element in its design. Using a sort of Muppet technique, with the addition of some jerky stop-frame animation, Belial is slightly rubbery looking at times but startlingly effective nevertheless. Interesting to note how the recent cult favourite, *Eraserhead* with the same sort of production background, also had a similar point-of-empathy deformity.

It really is Belial and Kevin Van Hentenryck who hold the film together through the turgid passages of relentless mugging by the other "actors". Their telepathic communication is well handled and surprisingly affecting. The climax where both twins fall out of a hotel window almost verges on the operatic as a distraught Belial tries to save his brother's life while both are swinging in front of a neon sign. Belial is responsible for this action though as sexual jealousy has inevitably reared its ugly head and prompted him to take revenge on Duane's newly acquired girlfriend. This rape/murder scene is the most disturbing in the whole film and one of the reasons why detractors will probably label *Basket Case* as sheer exploitive grossness. In a way, they will be right of course, and it is for precisely this reason that this genuinely strange item will ensure its cult success. There are two versions available of *Basket Case*, one contains the full hardcore violence and the other is a softer recut. I can't honestly say which version I saw: this was very grisly but I have seen worse.

Henenlotter who directed, wrote and edited *Basket Case* and has an intriguing heritage behind him of *Son of Psycho*, *Lurid Women* and *Slash of the Knife*, deserves full credit for pulling off such a fraught venture with skill, panache and determination in the face of all his self-confessed adversity ○



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the blade cuts

It's very common for a film to go through various versions at script stage, and even more common for a film to undergo severe alterations at the editing bench. For the most part these alterations go unrecorded, and in the final analysis it is the completed work only in which the audience is interested. Such changes are often picked up on years later when the film is looked at retrospectively, when the people concerned are somewhat removed from the property. But not so with *Blade Runner*. During the intensive interviews that we have conducted to bring you *The Blade Runner Chronicles in Starburst*, we have gleaned a lot of information about scenes shot for the film which didn't make it into the final release print and also other ideas which never made it beyond final shooting script stage.

Below: The storyboard for the death of Zora, which ended up differently in the final film.

In early drafts of the script, *Blade Runner* included a prologue sequence in which it is shown how Deckard (Harrison Ford) came to be a retired rep-detect:

The film opens with a shot of a farm. One of those huge, rolling farmscapes common in Wyoming or Arkansas. A mighty tractor of Leviathan proportions tills the soil. It is operated by a large man, although he is obviously *not* human. Rather, he is an early model Nexus replicant who has run away and is trying to lead the life of a human. Deckard arrives in a Spinner and sets down near the farmhouse. He alights and goes into the building. Signs of life—soup cooking on the stove, etc. Outside the tractor stops and the replicant climbs down. A powerful figure of nearly seven feet, his dry parchment-like skin barely disguises his synthetic origins. As he steps onto the verandah of the house the floor sags under his weight and he enters, asking Deckard what he wants. As Deckard moves towards him, the replicant makes a move as if to attack him. Quick as a flash, Deckard draws his gun and shoots him down. He goes over to the inert form. He bends down and takes hold of the lower jaw of the replicant, and with an almighty heave, wrenches the jawbone out. Holding it up he notes a serial number stamped inside. The purpose of this scene was to demonstrate how the job of the Blade Runner had changed over the years. In the early days when the machines looked only vaguely human it was morally easy to blow them away. As the years pass and the replicants become closer to human, it gives Deckard reason to hate his job. Echoes of this moral dilemma can now be found in the voice over of Ford when he describes his disgust at killing Zhora the snake dancer (Joanna Cassidy).

Another prologue was also considered but rejected because of cost factors. This was a sequence devised to show both the Off-World origins of Roy Batty and the power of the replicants. The scene opens with a vast furnace into which a conveyor belt is feeding dead replicants. From the pile of bodies rises Batty (Rutger Hauer) and the other five replicants. A battle ensues with the guards of the furnace, in which we see the sheer physical strength of the replicants and their will to survive at all costs. The scene was to end with Batty looking heavenward, and with a primal scream pointing at the dot in space which is the Earth. Virtually nothing remains of this idea though some of its power can be detected in Batty's speech where he describes some of the things he has seen Off-World.

Yet another variation of this sequence helps explain the appearance of the weird symbols covering Batty's body in



the closing stages of the film. As explained by Bryant (M. Emmet Walsh), Batty is a fighting machine, a warrior replicant. In an unfilmed early shot we were to have seen Batty encased in a bizarre suit. As he stands before us, the suit begins to open layer by layer, something like a flower opening. As the final layer is shed we see fine wire implants going into strange markings on his body. An interesting concept for this scene was to be that the suit peels away on command by the replicant.

Another interesting deletion concerned the replicant master himself, Tyrell. In that version it was shown that Tyrell is also a replicant. The Tyrell Corporation mega-structure is actually a pyramid and at the base of this is a cryogenic chamber which houses the body of the real Tyrell. The replicant Tyrell, along with creating near human genetically engineered machines is also trying to discover a way to bring the real Tyrell back to life. Another variation had Tyrell's bones buried beneath the building protected by so-called Pyramid Power.

The climax of *Blade Runner* also went through many changes, most of which occurred at the editing stage. But one of these involved a screenplay deletion very early on when the film was going under the title *Dangerous Days or Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the original title of the Philip K. Dick novel upon which it is based. At this point, the screenplay still rested on Dick's premise that Deckard's great desire and the reason why he takes on the job of hunting down the wayward replicants is so that he can afford to buy a real sheep to replace the mechanical one he has. After falling in love with Rachel (Sean Young) and despatching Batty and co he returns home to find the girl rep standing on the roof holding his real sheep. They have a conversation in which she compares herself to how the fake sheep must be feeling, ignored in favour of a real one. Maybe one day Deckard will dispose of her in favour of a real woman? She hands the animal to Deckard and in her sad despair steps over the edge of the roof. Deckard gets into his spinner and heads out into the desert wastelands. As he sits, staring at the sand, he sees a movement and a small tortoise crawls out. The *Blade Runner* is delighted at this discovery of life in a world of supposedly devoid life outside of zoos and very expensive pet shops. He sits for a time watching the little animal crawl around and then he flips it over on its back. Hours pass as the creature tries to right itself and Deckard depressed at the loss of Rachel watches with morbid fascination. Finally the tortoise manages to get back on its feet and waddles off. For Deckard this symbolises that humanity is going to survive, no matter what the odds the future stacks against it.

Oddly, part of this scene remains in the final film, although only in a verbal sense. During the opening ▶



Left: Ridley Scott directs Harrison Ford during the shooting of *Blade Runner*.



Voight-Kampff test in which Holden quizzes Leon (Brion James) in an effort to reveal his true identity, one of the questions he asks involves a tortoise trapped on its back. This coupled with the question about Leon's mother is what gets Holden killed.



FILMED YET DELETED

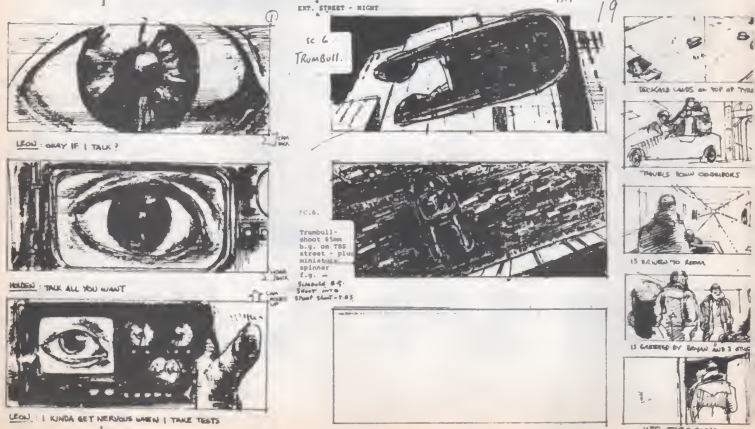
The major sequence which has been cut from the film involves a unicorn. As the film stands now, the scene at the end in which Deckard finds an origami unicorn left by Gaff (Edward James Olmos) has no meaning other than that Gaff has been at Deckard's apartment and has, for whatever reason, allowed the replicant Rachel to live. In an early cut of the film there was a sequence in which Deckard drops off to sleep (probably after his encounter with Leon) and dreams. He is standing in a forest. There is a thunder of hooves and as he looks up he sees a magnificent unicorn gallop out of the trees. He wakes up, puzzled by the vision. The significance is obvious, of course. Deckard himself is a

replicant, though unaware of it. As much is made of the importance of the false memories implanted into the reps (see Rachel's scene in which she discovers that the memories she thinks are of her mother are actually those of Tyrell's niece), the only way that Gaff can have of knowing about Deckard's unicorn dream is that he has access to the information file regarding the memory implants in the rep detect. Exactly why this was removed is unclear, although I'm inclined to think it is because it may have been thought unwise to further show Deckard as an "unhuman" hero. Astute viewers of the film though, will pick up on Deckard's real nature in the love scene with Rachel, a parallel between Batty and Pris' (Daryl Hannah) kiss in Sebastian's (William Anderson) Bradbury apartment. As much as romance is something new to Rachel, so it is to Deckard, though he has the street experience to know what to do.

Another major change to *Blade Runner* involves an addition rather than a deletion, and once again occurs at the climax. In Ridley Scott's first cut which was previewed in Dallas and Denver, the film ends with Deckard and Rachel entering the lift and the door closing. With the information that Rachel is a special brand of Nexus whose life span may (or may not) be longer than four years, the audience is left uncertain of the future the two have together. Given the milieu of the film and the frightening futureworld presented by Scott throughout the story, it's obvious that it could not have ended any other way. The climax of this version is completely logical. However preview audiences responded badly to this ending and it was felt (by the Ladd Company? By Warner Brothers?) that a more upbeat or positive climax would help the film.

Along with this decision also came the news that *Blade Runner* would also be "tightened up" and made pacier.

The cuts are actually minimal, although they change the tone of the film considerably. Leon's Voight-Kampff test is shortened by a couple of questions and the opening flight over Los Angeles 2019 at the beginning is trimmed down. A portion of the chase involving Zhora is missing when Deckard jumps onto the bonnet of a car, although the actual shooting of the rep is intact. Other cuts involve "atmosphere" shots in the streets. The advertising blimp was seen more often, appearing in several shots. This had the effect of making LA 2019 a place to escape from, adding to the claustrophobic mood of the city. Gone too is some of the violence, in particular Deckard's fight with Pris in the Bradbury which has been trimmed up quite a bit, including an excruciating shot in which she almost rips his nose off. However it is highly likely that when you see *Blade Runner*



much of this will be put back in. The English and European versions of the film are going to be considerably tougher than that released on America—thank heavens!

And so to the ending. As I have indicated, the original cut concluded with the lift door closing. However this was thought too ambiguous(?) by the powers that be (not Ridley Scott, I hasten to add) so the film now ends with Deckard and his rep lady speeding along a country road, followed by an aerial shot of beautiful countryside which looks suspiciously like out-takes from the opening of *The Shining*. The audiences that I have seen this version with have all laughed at this ludicrous conclusion. Obvious questions arise. If LA 2019 is such a miserable place to live why do people have to go Off-World to escape it when it would seem all this beautiful and unspoiled countryside appears to be just a Spinner's journey away? As Vangelis' gorgeous score fills the soundtrack we see Deckard's Spinner driving along a road and there is a sudden cut to an aerial view, as if the car were flying, after it's been well established that Deckard's car is a decommissioned vehicle which no longer flies. Silly stuff, and a vain effort on the part of whoever to make the film more "acceptable" to mass audiences. Sorry Ladd Company, sorry Warners, mass audiences aren't stupid.

Finally, a word about the voice over narration which the film now has. *Blade Runner* was always intended to have a Chandler-esque narration, but not the one it sports now. In the first version I saw, it was used sparsely and to great effect. For example, as the film stands now, Deckard talks and talks over Batty's slow death (explaining to that same mass audience?) why he thinks that replicant saves his life. Ford's original line simply ran, "I sat for six hours and watched him die." Chillingly evocative, it added greatly to the feeling that Batty understood his fate and saving Deckard's life was simply that he valued life now that he could see his own drawing to a close. This is now all verbalised by Ford's narration, cheapening the emotional effect considerably.

As editor Alan McKenzie has said in the fiftieth issue of *Starburst*, why don't people who hire the people to make the films, LET the people make the films? Ridley Scott is a film maker of immense talent and *Blade Runner*, even in this somewhat butchered version remains little short of a masterpiece. Had audiences been able to see Scott's cut I'm sure they would have preferred it. It seems such a pity that ever since the movies began, film makers have not been left alone by the corporations who provide the cash to make them. Film making is an art and craft—leave it to the artists and craftsmen!

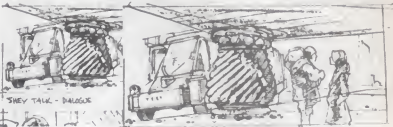


SEBASTIAN EXITS TRUCK



SEBASTIAN EXITS TRUCK

SEB. MOVES IN - PRIS STEPS IN HIS WAY



THEY TALK - DIALOGUE

THEY TALK - DIALOGUE



THEY MOVE TO DOORS - SECURITY DEVICE

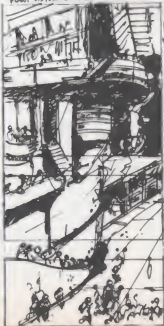
Above and below:
More of Ridley
Scott's
Story boards.



EXITS SPINAGE



COMMERCIAL - BATTY GOES DOWN - PRIS WALKS AND TALKS



WALKS LOWER CITY



PRIS AND GALT - GALT'S



PRIS AND GALT



PRIS AND GALT



PRIS AND GALT

Sc 47
Thruout
the scene
SEBASTIAN



SPINAGE BACK THROUGH TUNNEL



LOWER VIEW - SPINAGE UP AND OUT OF TUNNEL - PRIS AND GALT WALKING TO GET SPINAGE



PRIS AND GALT

Sc 48 (A)
Thruout
the scene
PRIS AND
GALT
MOTION
CONTROL

Sc 48
1st ABSTRACT
Room
(PLAN A)
Floor 0/0
Floor 1/0
Lightweight
Spinning

SCENE IN ROOM (48)
PRIS GOES DOWN TO ST.

THE BLADE RUNNER CHRONICLES



Starburst: How did you get involved in *Blade Runner*?

Syd Mead: I got a call from the Gower Street Studios and went along for a meeting with Ridley Scott, Michael Deeley and Ivor Powell. That was before Larry Paul came on line as art director. At that time the script was called *Dangerous Days*, which was Hampton Fancher's re-write of the Phil Dick novel. Right off we discussed the prime vehicle to be seen in the film, which was the Spinner—the star hardware

Interview by
Phil Edwards
and Alan
McKenzie

SYD MEAD

piece in the film. I told Ridley that I felt strongly that the Spinner should be an enclosed-lift vehicle. There's an aerodynamic principle called aerodyne which is essentially an enclosed-lift system, because flying cars can be a bugaboo. The visual thing of wings coming out, rotating parts and all of that. I thought it would be sort of naive to do that. So I suggested this enclosed-lift vehicle which would simply open some little vents and rise up off the ground essentially in its own ground space. Ridley was initially concerned about the Spinner. My primary job was just to design the vehicles for the film. We had the Spinner, the truck for Sebastian, a People's Car—sort of a background filler, Deckard's sedan, which in the character's case was a sort of official equipped standard sedan with the Esper remote unit and visualisation hardware on board, and we had the taxi to round out the urban rolling stock for the film. So I was originally hired just to design the hardware.

Once the production got rolling I presented the final gouache sketches to Ridley. When I do illustrations like that I like to do some background to them, to show the object totally immersed into its use-ambiance. Ridley started to like the detail that was surrounding the vehicles themselves in the sketches. So Ridley said, "Let's try the street sets." Larry Paul and Peter Schneider, my business manager and I went to the back lot at Warner Brothers and we took photographs of the New York street set which was used over and over again for endless movies and TV shows. Essentially I did a machine invention over those old facades. In subsequent meetings with Ridley and Larry Paul we arrived at kind of a sociological idea which was that the city had risen up from one, two, three story structures in the older sections. The World Trade Centre in New York stands at 110 stories high; a two thousand foot structure is planned for the Chicago area, so it wasn't too fantastic to imagine that a city in 2020 A.D. might have structures 3000 feet high. I did a kind of cross section diagram of that kind of urban plant as a facility. Forty to sixty stories above the street becomes a whole second operational platform with runways and building to building connections and so forth. When you build a 3000 foot high structure, you need to approach to it, something like the old Medieval castles with fortifications, hills and structures. That's how we arrived at the sloped pyramidal look—essentially like the foothills of a mountain range.

So you'd collect people and vehicular traffic and eventually build a pyramid up to the underside of these structures at maybe the sixty to one hundred story level—and then you'd go up to the 3000 foot level. That started off the design of the street level, because you'd have service tubes and machinery on the street and generators and add on vent tubes and so forth. We turned the street into a kind of service access to the bottom side of the city, and that produced the look of the street sets.

Were you influenced by any other futuristic films, like *Metropolis* for example?

I have to honestly say that I have not seen that film. We really just invented our way along and what we did was to invent a kind of visual recognition gate system for the movie. Once that was set you could have different crews and different design people working on the film and come up with a "match-up" among all the people and all the fixtures that were built. And of course Ridley had the overview and would yes or no the process at arriving at the final set work and the props.

How did you find working with Ridley Scott... he is an artist himself?

Very enjoyable. *Blade Runner* is the first movie I've worked on from beginning to end, although I worked on the concept for *V'ger* in *Star Trek The Motion Picture*. Ridley would do his sketches and drawings (called *RidVids*) for me. The sketches I did and presented to Ridley and Larry Paul went through, in most cases, on the first pass or certainly on the second, which was a very efficient way to

get it done. I used his *RidVids* to show me the sort of thing he wanted, a visual vocabulary or mood he was after. I would transmute that, with my particular point of view and interpretive technique and come up with something that came into line with his visualisation format. It really went along very, very well.

How did you work with Larry Paul, the art director?

He was full time on the film and I acted as a consultant, as I have my own business to run as well as working on *Blade Runner*. I would bring in sketches and finished gouache renderings, and Larry Paul's staff would then take these and translate them into working drawings which became the final sets. His job as art director was to ensure the visualised ideas were as close as possible to what Ridley wanted, and translate those into finished sets to budget, which was stretched.

How much of Los Angeles 2000 as seen in *Blade Runner*, is your vision of the future?

That's a dangerous question, because I could say all of it. But the essential visual context was what I was hired to produce. Now how that was distributed among the various design staff, like Doug Trumbull's group EEG, they did the Tyrell pyramid; Hades—the industrial zone; the turret-shaped police headquarters building and the ancillary buildings that were in that set—that was all done at Trumbull's facility. The visual look of the movie was essentially Ridley's decision that it had to look this way, and I contributed part of that and others contributed their share.

Are you happy with the final result, visually?

The street sets were so close to my original tempera/gouache renderings, that when I did finally get to the back lot to make a promotional film for the Ladd Company, it was like walking around in one of my gouache sketches—very, very close.

Was that the first time you had seen that sort of realisation of your art and design?

Yes, on that scale. You are walking on a normal size street intersection, and it has been three dimensionalised from a flat tempera picture. To walk around it, to see the shapes and textures and little fine building detail was sort of spooky! I've gone through work jags where I've worked for nearly 24 hours a day and ended up dreaming of being in one of my own renderings, but this is the first time it's happened while I've been wide awake! A very strange sensation ○

This spread: A series of illustrations, comparing Syd Mead's paintings with the final results in the finished film.



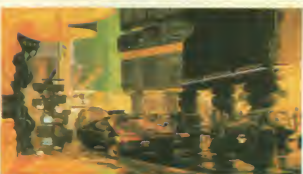


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This page: The paintings of Syd Mead, along with some of their real-life counterparts, from the film *Blade Runner*.



created this whole science fiction

movie. It's absolutely

me about. I thought, "What the hell
making that as a subject and doing it
tely incredible.

The Duellists, and I was preparing,
vide, which is pretty bloody

that. It was one of the reasons I
whole premise of his (Lucas)

vision of a world—was great. It was
ner than 2007, to date, and I just
ple. I never go to a film twice, but I

in *Blade Runner in America?*

an obvious action adventure movie.
of Harrison Ford is action

reviews in America didn't go down

h, the first three previews went

in the morning I don't gauge a

try in the audience. Because

from an audience of eleven or
hundred cards and ask the audience
who comes out of a movie will

think, if he's not asked, he either did or didn't like it. But if he is asked
at the door to fill out a questionnaire, he's going to become a "critic".
There were certain elements, like an argument about the sound
being too "big", although I totally disagree about that. Out of seven
hundred cards about eighty said, "Too Loud", yet they loved the film.
I think part of the energy of the movie is the loudness of it, is part
of the excitement of the movie. You don't hear all the words Mick
Jagger sings when you go to a Rolling Stones concert—but it's an
experience. So I disagree with how most of those preview junkets
are run. You spend a year and a half of your life doing a film, judging a
film the way you think it ought to be, then you can actually start
changing the whole bloody premise, just because you get a certain
number of cards. Absolute nonsense! So the three previews were
very good. But I think what happens is you get a level of thinking,
where different people work different ways. Say, certain individuals
to do with the film making progress will work NDT on gut feeling, will
work only on facts or what seem to be facts, on a piece of paper.
You're asking an average individual to be a critic, and I think that's
wrong. You're putting him on a soapbox he's not used to, therefore
he may think beyond what his gut feeling may tell him. So when I go
to a preview I never sit, I just wander around and gauge gut reaction
and excitement and energy from the audience in the auditorium. The
only thing I disagree with is the cut back on the violence—although I
think violence is the wrong word for the film, because it isn't a violent
film, more a threat of violence. The intensity of the film makes people
expect violence, so the first preview half the audience were under
their seats! I thought, "Oh God. This will be a negative preview. ▶





because the reaction will come down from the cards. "Too Violent" and then I'll have debates on how much I cut back on the violent. I can be violent in film terms if I want to. But I specifically decided not to get too violent, I went for a PG (Parental Guidance, roughly equivalent to an AA certificate) when I was shooting it. *The fight with Pris for example, had her put her fingers in Deckard's nose and hold his head back...*

That's going back in. The version going out in Europe is a tougher version than going out in America.

What about the ending that the film has now? I felt the first version I saw with just the lift door closing was a lot more appropriate. Why are all these people living in this awful city when there is all this beautiful countryside just a Spinner's journey away?

There's an answer to that. Why do people live in Manhattan or on 42nd Street when you can just go upstate New York, or go and live in Alaska or somewhere? Because it's not practical to live there, especially within the world we were presenting in *Blade Runner*. I found the first version we saw created a much more nightmarish vision and, in a sense, a lot more realistic one than the second cut, which I felt was an attempt to make the film pacier and try and meet that audience who are expecting a Harrison Ford action picture.

To a degree, I agree with you. I thought the first cut that you saw was it. That was *the* version. The only thing I'm not sure about—because the film was so intense—I think you needed that kind of outlet at the end to let them off the hook, rather than just ending on that elevator door. The elevator door was the perfect intellectual ending, but it also felt like a prison, it also felt like the end of the road. And that I found, maybe, just too oppressive for words. Although in the context of the movie, which in a way was Philip Dick's novel in ambience and nuance, rather than taking all the absolute details of the story from the novel. You couldn't do that—it would be too complicated—you'd have a four hour movie. But I tried to indicate the world of the Dick novel in the environment. I think Dick was delighted with that when he saw what we had done. I met him just before he died. So the version going out here is much closer to the version you saw first, although it still ends on that landscape. I think the only other landscape I would have had at the end was around Mount Helens, so you could see that the world was polluted, that there was still a problem.

That all still ties in with the references to visiting Off-World and so on



... Sure, because that's the film we did. The trouble is that you always get people wanting to change in mid-stream, once things begin. You always get this change of mind during the process of making a film, because people chicken out—there are arguments and discussions obviously. Heavy debate.

It's interesting that in America now there seems to be reaction against films that are too graphic or have downbeat endings. The Thing, for example isn't doing well while E.T. is. With The Thing people are objecting to the graphic nature of it and the fact that you don't get a resolution to who is the Thing.

I think the ending of *The Thing* was confusing, puzzling. I think in one sense, a cardinal rule is, whatever you do, whether it's downbeat or not, you must have some kind of final resolution. I think *The Thing* is a very well-made movie, one of his (Carpenter's) best made movies to date. In fact I'm hoping to work with Rob Bottin on the next film I'm doing. It's been written for a year, but it's just moving into production. It's a Dark Ages fairy story. If we do the film together, we both want gentler aspects of the creature world. I actually think Bottin is the best at it. There are things going on in *The Thing* that are quite remarkable.

Did you come to Blade Runner or did Blade Runner come to you?
It came to me. Michael Deeley brought me the script when it was called *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* It had been developed as a screenplay by two guys Hempton Fancher (who wrote it) and Brian Kelly, who was the executive producer. They has asked Michael to get involved with it and try and get it moving for them, which he did. He got involved in the writing. They brought a draft to me and I thought it was really interesting, and it moved off from there.

What appealed to you in the screenplay?

What appealed to me was, having just done *Alien* which was interesting to do, in the sense I was dealing with future on a very realistic level, and so the involvement in just developing that environment really fascinated me. I love that whole process anyway, almost as much as making any other part of a movie. I just didn't want to step off onto more ordinary ground. I felt what was great about the *Blade Runner* script was that it was dealing with *near* future. It should be a familiar city, which it is. A lot of aspects of that city are familiar right now. In fact a lot of people who see the film will experience that kind of future. I also liked the aspect that there was a real character in there, rather than what is frequently a two dimensional cardboard character, which happens a lot of science fiction films. Because usually the film is dominated by something else, dominated by a monster or an event and the characters do, essentially, take second place. So that was interesting, and I just didn't want to get off the genre. I think the whole genre is wonderful and I'm developing other ideas in different zones of the field. ▶



This spread: A selection of scenes showing the main characters in Ridley Scott's breathtaking movie, Blade Runner. Rutger Hauer as Batty, Harrison Ford as Rick Deckard.

I suppose in a sense that *The Duneists* dealt with an alien world? Sure. Past is the same as doing future. I'm doing past now with *Legend*—some past, past time, it will not still be the Celtic notion of a fairy-story world. It will be a version of it and utilize aspects of that, what we believe fairies to be, but it will be very much enlarged upon. How did you develop the visual concept of what's been called "Ridleyville" in *Blade Runner*?

It's an instinctive layering process that occurs from day to day, hour by hour when you're working on it with the writer, when you're dealing with the art director or the production designer or the illustrator. The illustrator, in the films that I do, always plays a very important part. I have an illustrator even before I have a production designer. I go straight to the heart of the matter and go to the illustrator who I think is the best in the field, and will be right for the film. I brought Syd Mead in.



Above right: Batty meets his maker as his maker meets HIS maker!

It struck me, both with *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, that the story is almost secondary. You pack each frame with vast amounts of information which I feel a lot of people in general audiences may not grasp on a first viewing. It reminds me of the work of Dario Argento (*Suspense, Inferno*) which is making cinema something else than just storytelling.

I firmly believe that. Absolutely. I used to get told, when I was working in television, "Stop fiddling with the props!" because in a sense I was the learner then, and that was not "the way". I've now discovered "the way" is whichever way you decide it should be. If you are doing a film, then it goes along your way, or should do! Otherwise you shouldn't be called the director. Therefore, I have very much developed that side of the story telling. That story is that much more interesting because of the reality of the environment, the reality of the ambience of the city. I personally don't think it does over-shadow the story.

Would you say that style of "information packing" comes out of your background in commercials, where you have to impart a lot of information into a ten or twenty second piece of film?

No. I think it's built into one's character. I just happen to be that way. When I started out as a painter I'd tend to tackle a painting in that kind of way. In fact, at that particular time, I was discouraged from being a painter because my work was too detailed, which seems to be a very odd sort of decision, to say that, "You're never going to be a painter lad, because you're painting motorbikes in great detail!" That

was twenty years ago. And today painters are selling paintings of high-reality—the new realists—I was doing paintings like that. They couldn't grasp that—which at the time was right! I suppose, because the style in art schools at the time was kind of social realism—men in pub scarves wearing flat caps and drinking beer. All very much after Degas, that kind of influence. I'm from the North of England, so there was a whole school in the Midlands and the North who all tended to paint the same way, because they were influenced by their environment. Though I'm Northern born, I moved around a lot and though it was difficult as far as French or Latin goes, to go to ten different schools, I think it paid off in other ways. I think the most interesting years for me were four years spent in Germany, just after the War, so I saw a blitzed Germany.

Was it your interest in what I'll call "hyper reality" that attracted you to towards Syd Mead as an illustrator? His is very much of that school.

Yes. I think his technique, in terms of his visuals, are wonderful. Although it's more than just a painterly facility—he's got a real vision. A real sense of what *may* be, of what could happen, and obviously this is all backed up in the way he knows things are developing and this is reflected in his work. He also designs very sleek things as well. When we first met we decided very early on that we didn't want this type of sleekness for *Blade Runner*. It would be a world where maybe you get three different kinds of engines in vehicles, depending on what The Fuel of the Week is! Maybe they have developed a hydrogen pellet, or just, or maybe there's the tail and of gasoline which is costing five or six pounds a gallon. So you get this very strange conglomerate car, which is also a very small vehicle, for obvious reasons of practicality. They're doing that now.

How great would you say Syd Mead's input was into the production design of the film?

It started off that we just brought Syd in to do the cars. I'd bought a book he'd done called *Sentinel* (currently out of print) which is something I do, just compiling a library of this sort of stuff. When the film came along, ideally I would have liked Moebius (Jean Giraud) and Syd Mead. Moebius couldn't get involved in *Blade Runner*, because he was involved in another project at the time. I thought Syd could only handle cars, but he came in and started to blast through the cars so quickly, and he keyed in so fast on the kind of vehicles I wanted. After that we started to move on to buildings, mega-structures, interiors like Deckard's kitchen in his apartment. I also wanted a sense that there may have been a renaissance of decorative designing in architecture, but module structures nevertheless. You won't have people going out and carving doors any more, but you are going to have a process of casting, so even the block structures in concrete become decorative. There's a kind of reaction to all this austerity and all these awful mirror fronted buildings we see now. Los Angeles happens to have a lot of Frank Lloyd Wright houses in it. We were going to use one of these buildings, the Ennis House which is in very good condition. But we couldn't use it, so instead we took castings from the house. Syd Mead took the basic idea and then did visuals of the kitchen, bathroom and he drew the exterior of the apartment structure where Deckard lives. He did all the external matte paintings for the tops of the buildings...

Did he design the Tyrell Corporation building?

No. The Tyrell Corporation was very much a combination. There was an idea in there, which isn't there now. I didn't want Tyrell to be the usual head of a corporation. There was an idea in there where you were dealing in the world of replicants and replication and genetics, where if you are capable of building a man, then you are certainly capable of successful cryogenic engineering, putting people away for years in a deep freeze. I wanted the character of Tyrell to look vaguely Egyptian, vaguely Tutankamen—he almost looks embalmed. In fact there was a development in the story, where Tyrell was dead and kept in a cryogenic chamber awaiting discovery of whatever disease he has died of. He'd certainly make replicants of himself. In fact, if I were him, I'd make six! One in London, one in America, one in Tokyo and so on! That's why the pyramid occurred. I drew the pyramid and the approach to the Tyrell Corporation, because I always storyboard things. Then Doug Trumbull took that over and developed it to what it is. Trumbull instigated setting up his unit again for the film and brought in a really excellent guy named David Kryger who was the special effects director.

While talking about the visual design, could you explain the 40s noir look to much of the film, for example Rachel's costumes?

That was the development that came in fairly early on. It was partly the way the character was written by Hampton Fancher. Deckard was a kind of laconic realist. It started to emerge for me that he was a kind of Merloffe figure, which is an obvious comparison. Therefore the generation of the idea of a voice over came very quickly, so eventually a screenplay was written very much with a voice over in mind. Therefore the next step came: what are the clothes going to look like? Like fashion does, it recycles itself—we have early 60s fashions at the moment. It certainly seemed to figure that people could be going through that kind of look then. She's not exactly 40s...

A kind of High Tech 40s look if it existed...

Yes... a little larger than life...

It also gives the film a timeless quality. Were you looking for that as well?

Yes. Future, or near future has that. I think that if you could pop forward forty years there wouldn't be that much change in some things. This room was as in for example could have been like that forty years ago—it's been in it for thirteen years. You'd step outside and things would start to be different. I think we just slightly enlarged on the way American cities are going at the moment.

I didn't particularly think that L.A. 2019 was really far enough in the future to present a city of that type.

Mexico City is going to be 25 million people in the next twelve years, the biggest city in the world. It's maybe a little short, and I don't necessarily think that forty years of genetic engineering will produce a human being, but it will have created a few extraordinary things and cured a few problems.

The screenplay of *Blade Runner* obviously went through many variations. I find it interesting that one of the major deletions survives, if only in part in the end sequence where Deckard finds the origami unicorn left by Gaff. Do you regret that some of those more intriguing aspects are no longer in the film?

Yes. Did you see the version with the unicorn?

No...

I think the idea of the unicorn was a terrific idea...

The obvious inference is that Deckard is a replicant himself.

Sure. To me it's entirely logical, particularly when you are doing a film noir, you may as well go right through with that theme, and the central character could in fact be what he is chasing. You could say it is corny or not corny. Something is usually only corny according to execution. There are only seven stories in the world, somebody said, everything else is variations on a theme.

Did you actually shoot the sequence in the glade with the unicorn?

Absolutely. It was cut into the picture, and I think it worked wonderfully. Deckard was sitting, playing the piano rather badly because he was drunk, and there's a moment where he gets absorbed and goes off a little at a tangent and we went into the shot of the unicorn plunging out of the forest. It's not subliminal, but it's a brief shot. Cut back to Deckard and there's absolutely no reaction to that, and he just carries on with the scene. That's where the whole idea of the character of Gaff with his origami figures—the chicken and the little stick-figure man, and the origami figure of the unicorn tells you that Gaff has been there. One of the layers of the film has been talking about private thoughts and memories, so how would Gaff have known that a private thought of Deckard was of a unicorn? That's why Deckard shook his head like that.

I found some astonishing touches of detail in *Blade Runner*. For example, in the shot of what Rachel thinks is a photograph of her mother (and is in fact a photograph of Tyrell's niece's mother), for a split second it comes to life. Was that more than just an incredibly flashy piece of film making or is it a reference to story point or character?

It was linked to, and heightening the ideas of memories and being drawn into those memories. Because a photograph is a piece of history, even if it's yesterday, it's history... a memory.

I notice this office is covered in photographs...

Mmmm... I wanted the photograph to have such a reality to it because Deckard gets drawn into Rachel's "memory"—it's a little bit like a woman showing a picture of a refugee to people asking, "Have you seen this child?" which is really what Rachel is doing.

"This is me with my mother." And he says, "Rubbish!" and really plunges into her about it. Then obviously has some remorse about it, because suddenly there's a kind of contact with her. He's thinking of a replicant like an android. In fact, what we find at the end of the film is that we are really dealing with human beings. It's kind of an enhancement of what's happening to him at that particular moment when he gets sucked into, "Is it real, or isn't it real?" I thought it was nice that that frame, for a second or two, came alive, and you also have the sound of children playing on the soundtrack, which is our memories.

How difficult was it to set up the film in America and why America end not here?

There were no difficulties in setting up the production, it got set up very fast and then Filmmay had difficulties and we decided very early on that we had better bail out, and we were then picked up by Jerry Perenchio and Bud Yorkin, and then in turn by the Ladd Company. That all took a little bit of tap-dancing, but generally speaking it was only uncomfortable for about two weeks. We did originally budget the film to be shot here at EMI and ironically, at the time, the budget worked out higher, than it would have done for America.

Why was that?

Because we were starting from scratch here, there is no back lot at EMI, so we would have had to build that complex. Whereas the complex we worked on, having rejected around the major cities in America, that could have been applicable to the film, decided that we

could never control it. And also we would have to have done so much layering, putting elements on already existing buildings, we would never have got all the permissions. The only way that seemed to make sense was to take over a back lot, and take whatever elements it had and add to it. It was a logical step.

How long did shooting take?

Seventeen weeks.

And how did you choose Harrison Ford?

I'd thought about Harrison originally for *Alien* and didn't dare go and ask him. I thought he'd say, "Are you kidding, I don't want to do another science fiction film." But I like the quality that Ford has, other than in the more obvious films like *Star Wars*, like *Raiders now*, although he hadn't done *Raiders* then. One of the films I liked very much was Coppola's *The Conversation*, which Ford was in and he also had a small part in *Apocalypse Now*. His performance in both



those areas is a rather watchful, menacing character, particularly *The Conversation*—he could have really been a hit man in that. Another of my favourite movies is Bertolucci's *The Conformist*, and to a degree, in *Blade Runner*, I was slightly influenced by that, in some of the visual aspects. But it all passes through your own personal filter system—in fact that was where some of the original thinking was—like the way Bertolucci shoots. And I love Trintignant, who was a totally unsympathetic character, not unlike Harrison, like he says at the beginning, "A kind of cold fish." But he's not really a cold fish, he's just a realist, a dour person. I figured he could do that.

In retrospect, having seen *Raiders now*, and you were casting *Blade Runner* tomorrow, would you still cast Harrison Ford?

Oh sure...

Because in a way he is very much a serial hero, almost a matinee

idol...

Then that's good for him, because this gives him two sides and

totally broadens his range.

What's it like working with Harrison Ford? What's his input like?

His level of input is big. He's an actor who is very much aware of the whole film making process and to a certain degree has his say, even to the point where it might be something going on near him or behind him, not just the actual scene itself. Interesting to work with.

Rutger Hauer is also very impressive, was he chosen because of his role in *Nighthawks*?

No, *Solder of Orange*. I wanted somebody who is physically not ▶

Above left: *Pris is played by Joanna Cassidy.*

"American", was apart somehow. Certainly in the film he's Tutonic, and that was an instinctive choice really, to go in that direction. I somehow tried to link it with *Alien*, because there are certain Tutonic aspects to Ian Holm as the robot, Ash. Very efficient end that was a deliberate decision to make.

Were there any links between *Ash in Alien* and the replicants in *Blade Runner*? It maybe a case of me reading into it too much, but an aspect of *Alien* that I found interesting were the by-the-way references to the Earth corporations...

There is a connection there...

...and *Blade Runner* could very much be what's happening on Earth while the crew of the *Nostromo* are having their encounter with the *Alien*.

It is in a way. Except what would be happening in space at the time *Blade Runner* is set, wouldn't be as advanced as *Alien*.



Above: Deckard (Harrison Ford) faces Batty (Rutger Hauer) in the climactic battle scene in *Blade Runner*.

Did you feel a link between the two films while you were making *Blade Runner*?

Dh sure. We made obvious comparisons. In fact, that was one of the reasons why I didn't want to do *Blade Runner* to start with, was because I'd just done a film with an android in it and that was another reason why we changed the word 'android', I couldn't stand that word any more! It was David People's daughter who came up with the word 'replicant'. She's actually studying genetics at UCLA, so it is a word that they use.

How did you work with Doug Trumbull on the effects?

Once again it's a layering process. During my editing period, very frequently I would be involved in the lighting of the miniatures and just the way the city looked. The tendency, initially, was to make it too austere, and I wanted it to be even busier in the air above the city. I put the input of all the advertising in, like the whole side of a building becomes an advertising area and so on. Because I was a designer, whoever I work with, it's very much a free exchange of ideas. Once again, maybe I'm reading too much into it, but I felt the way advertising motifs punctuated the film throughout, it was some kind of comment on your own past career in advertising.

It's also a way of enhancing the air traffic, because I was limited financially as to how much aerial traffic I could have. I would have liked a lot more aerial traffic, much more crowded, so you literally have a traffic jam. The advertising blimp was like an additional flying object, so I put that in wherever I could. That also echoes the idea

that if say, the city is 60 to 70 miles square or more, in that area there might be twelve blimps, each covering an area of twenty miles square or so each.

On the subject of details, there's a brief shot where Deckard, after his encounter with Leon, has a drink when he returns to his apartment. There's a ribbon of blood that runs into his glass. At what point do you add a detail like that?

Sometimes on the spur of the moment—that particular one was on the spur of the moment. If you have your lip bashed, first of all it stings like hell when you drink, so it's just a detail that I put in, which I find it interesting to do. It's necessary and very easy to do as well. It's a reality...

It's an extension of the super reality you were talking about in your painting...

Yes. The sequence in the *Bradbury* was very complicated. Did it take a long time to shoot?

Remarkably short. In fact, for this film, seventeen weeks is bloody quick, although part of that was involved on the post-production period. In fact, there weren't that many matte shots completed by the end of principal photography, or special effects shots completed. It's usually the case.

With hindsight, would you have made *Blade Runner* any differently?

No. Would you not like to have included some of the earlier ideas from the various scripts?

No... because I think this script is already difficult in that you are using three basic storylines: you are doing a character study of a character who is kind of a familiar character; you're seeing his predicament which is a type of love affair and you're doing an action adventure movie, and you're doing a city of the future. So you have four elements running through there. And every time you're off on the love story, the action adventure holds off and vice versa, so it's a very difficult kind of film to try and structure.

Are you disappointed that the references to Deckard being a replicant are no longer there?

The innuendo is still there. The French get it immediately! I think it's interesting that he could be.

At what point was the voice-over added? The original version we saw had very little. For example, at the end all that Deckard says is, "I sat for six hours and watched him die" which was very effective. The voice-over was added back in again. It started to get drawn out, because we never addressed the problem of the voice-over early enough. I wanted the voice-over from the beginning—the screenplay was written with a voice-over...

Is that the narration that's on it now?

No (pulling a face, that speaks volumes). I'm not to tellly happy with the voice over, and yet its an essential ingredient of the Marlowe-type character of Deckard, and also to a degree, helps clarification. One of the most interesting aspects of *Apocalypse Now*, was the voice-over—it was incredible. I think Coppola went on for nearly six months trying to get that voice right. I think, with hindsight, I would have liked to have redone the voice-over in *Blade Runner*, and I think Harrison would as well.

On a story point, was the reason that Batty saved Deckard's life and let him live because he recognised that he too was a replicant?

No. It was an endorsement in a way, that the character is almost more human than human, in that he can demonstrate a very human quality at a time when the roles are reversed and Deckard may have been delighted to blow his head off. But Roy Batty takes the humane route. But also, in a way, because he wants a kind of death watch, where he knows he is going, dying. So in a sense he is saving Deckard for something, to pass on that information that what the makers are doing is wrong—either the answer is not to make them at all, or deal with them as human beings. Obviously there's parallels to *Apartheid* and all sorts of things.

What about the dove that Batty has throughout the end sequence?

That was Rutger Hauer's idea, which I liked actually. I was worried about it at the time and kept staring at this dove and thinking, "Oh, God!" Because we were both slightly worried that it might be pretentious, although it doesn't come off that way at all—I think it worked beautifully...

But in what context?

Peace. It's odd that you have the warrior holding a dove. It's an obvious parallel.

And the nail through the hand?

There's obviously a reference to the obvious analogy, but it's not intended that way. It's a device of getting adrenalin at a point when his hand is beginning to go, because the first time you see Rutger Hauer in the film, you see his hand first, and he says, "Time enough," and I hope you realise that there is some kind of time problem. And then his hands starts to go again, which is like a symptom of his disease. One has to allow that mixing of analogies to happen, so that audiences can get different readings out of it, which they do. Play a piece of music to a group of a hundred people, and you'll get different readings off each person, and that's what, in a way, film can be.

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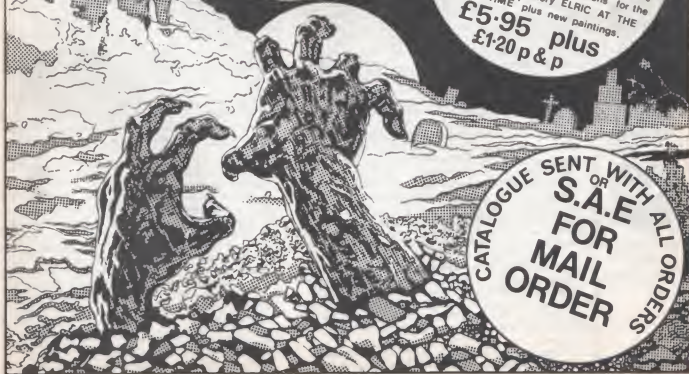
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BATTLETRUCK

Review by
Phil
Edwards



Battletruck marks American-born, but British-based, director Harley Cokliss' first full length feature after several years of tv and documentary work as well as two featurettes for the Children's Film Foundation (*Glitterball* and *The Battle of Billy's Pond*) and second unit work on *The Empire Strikes Back*. *Battletruck*, a co-production between Roger Corman and New Zealand backers is, at heart, a Western, though set in a futureworld which appears to run parallel to that of *Mad Max 2*. Oddly enough the film has been in various stages of development for many years and in some respects predates themes explored by the Mel Gibson cult feature.

Lensed amid stunning New Zealand locations, *Battletruck* is the story of Colonel Straker (an off-the-wall performance by James Wainwright) and his band of cut-throats who cheerfully raid what settlements they can find in a post apocalyptic world. They come up against Hunter (Michael Beck of *The Warriors*) a loner and recluse who gets around on a souped-up motorbike powered by repthane. It's a silly story really with many resonances of past cinematic delights ranging from *Seven Samurai* to *No Blade of Grass*, and the vehicle of the title is just a touch reminiscent of good old *Damnation Alley*. As I said, *Battletruck* is really a Western, never more apparent than in the closing moments when Hunter having disposed of the baddies, packs his horse up and heads off back to the mountains, leaving the girl Corlie (Annie McEnroe) behind. But what Cokliss has done, in using the pseudo Western framework is ignore what makes the best Westerns work, and that is *action*. Certainly *Battletruck* has its moments and there's a couple of spectacular displays of stuntwork which nearly rival *Mad Max* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but they are not enough. Far too much time is spent with the settlers and their pathetic Woodstock spirit and there is far too much talk without either plot or character development and advancement. A couple of scenes of graphic violence are thrown in arbitrarily, although with Corman money involved, these would seem to be more of a sop to the teenage drive-in crowd (the film has been retitled *Warlords of the 21st Century*) who are the likely American audience.

Part of the film's problem is that it is *too* gentile, which makes the occasional gore all the more gratuitous. For *Battletruck* to work properly it needs toughening up, although in this case tough doesn't mean violent. Just

tough action. There's a couple of lengthy scenes of Hunter speeding across the hills on his bike, clad in home made armour, which while having a pleasant mythic quality about them are nothing more than time fillers and a demonstration of cinematographer Chris Mengies' skill. Beck's Hunter too, is a pretty weak characterisation and while the intent may have been to out-Eastwood Eastwood, the result is just Wood(en). For as with most films of this type which employ some sort of superhero, it is the villains who are really interesting. While Wainwright is on screen, casually committing mayhem and murder, or making unhealthy advances to his daughter Corlie, *Battletruck* really works. For those brief moments it is a fascinating study of a megalomaniac on power of a hopeless situation and thanks to the actor's sturdy performance the film remains memorable.

Cokliss is an interesting talent, but he still has much to learn about story construction and characterisation, for after it's well handled opening the film stutters and sputters along a bit like Hunter's motorbike. But the film looks terrific and the locations used by the young director suit the mood of the story perfectly if not the final execution. The sharp super and crisp photography add much to the picture and Chris Mengies, work throughout is a delight.

But the real star of *Battletruck* is the vehicle itself. A huge lumbering two section truck, heavily armoured and equipped with a nasty looking cow catcher, its every appearance in the film notches up the production's credibility. The final sequence in which it goes hurtling over a cliff in slow motion, while recalling a similar scene in Spielberg's *Duel*, is genuinely spectacular and exciting — the only sounds we hear are those of the grinding, twisting metal of the *Battletruck* in its death throes.

At the moment *Battletruck* has yet to find a distributor in this country. I hope that Cokliss can see the sense in doing some further re-editing work on the film. For really *Battletruck* isn't that bad a film, just a little dumb in places, and some judicious cutting would tighten it up quite a lot, and while it's not a masterpiece by any stretch of the imagination, England can't afford to let a director of Cokliss' enthusiasm and burgeoning talent escape.

In a forthcoming issue of *Starburst* I'll be talking to Harley Cokliss about the making of *Battletruck* and also his forthcoming sf thriller, *Contagious* ○



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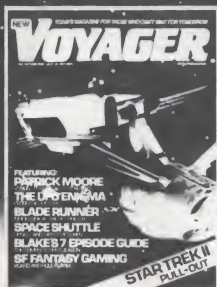
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SPIELBERG'S E.T.

A full pre-release report on the movie of the year
by Tony Crawley



Above: Steven Spielberg on the set of *E.T.* Inset: Henry Thomas in an early scene as he makes his first contact with the *E.T.* Opposite: Henry Thomas and his screen brother and sister in scenes from the film.

Now, the good news. The quite amazing news. Having raked in a record-bending 106,622 dollars inside one month, *E.T.* has now surpassed *Grease* (at last!) and vaulted into No 5 position in the top films of history. In, I repeat, its first month of business... just 31 days!

This rapid jump to glory means that the five films at the top of *Variety's* list of all-time box-office champs—the basis of our annual *Fantasy Film Chart* in *Starburst*—have all been produced and/or directed by George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. Steve, in fact, has directed three of the top five moneymakers in history. And he's managed that in seven years.

For the moment, the Top Five reads: 1, *Star Wars*; 2, *The Empire Strikes Back*; 3, *Jaws*; 4, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; 5, *E.T.*

And I expect these films to remain the top five by the time of our next *Fantasy Chart*, although not necessarily in that order. *Raiders* is increasing its figures with its current re-issue in America—but like everything else it's way, but way behind *E.T.* in terms of business. The very weekend *Raiders* re-opened, *E.T.* took in three times as much loot at the box-office and it sure hasn't stopped yet.

In our next chart, I think you can safely bet that *E.T.* 'll be in third position. There's even a possibility that it could actually move as high as second place.

Lucas strikes back with his American re-issue of *Star Wars* and he has *Empire* back out again for Christmas over there and again in April by which time, I suppose, *E.T.* 'll be ready for its first re-issue.

But through all this, a dark cloud hangs over Spielberg.

As if the chopper crash on *Twilight Zone* (see *Things to Come*) is not enough to give Spielberg a breakdown (reportedly, poor John Landis is close to one, himself) Steve is also faced by a 750-million dollar lawsuit by writer Lisa Litchfield. It's a par for the course action in which the writer alleges that *E.T.* is based on her 1978 copyrighted play, *Lokey From Maldmar*.

Her lawyer alleges that Spielberg changed the play's two aliens into one and switched the father character to the mother in the film... and adds that Universal president Ned Tann wrote to Lisa Litchfield in October, 1979, turning down her play as a film idea.

Well, we've been here before. Hardly any megafilm—or indeed any film, big or small—is made in Hollywood without someone claiming they've been ripped-off. It happened this time last year with three men claiming *Raiders* was their story. They announced a lawsuit asking of 110-million dollars' damages. Obviously inflation has hit lawsuits, too.

Indeed, Spielberg must be quite used to such actions by now. He has one kind of lawsuit or another slapped on all his recent films—*Close Encounters*, *Raiders*, *Poltgergeist*, *E.T.* and, tragically, *Twilight Zone*. Only one of his last six films got through the net. That was *1941*. Then again, that was his only flop among those last six films... He says the *E.T.* suit is "completely without merit." Neither Spielberg or Universal will dignify it with further comments.

Surely, if Lisa Litchfield's claim is correct, she ought to be suing, not Spielberg, but the writer of the *E.T.* script, Melissa Mathison.

Except she's not so rich and famous...

(Editor's note: Though I've not seen *E.T.* as of press time, I would point out that the premise of Mr Spielberg's film sounds a lot closer to the story of the film, *Man From Planet X*. In that Edgar Ulmer film, the title character is an alien of the friendly persuasion who lands on Earth and is frightened when an obsessive scientist tries to learn his secrets. The scientist's daughter (if I remember correctly) helps the strange little man escape the humans and return to his home planet. Now, for me, that is closer to *E.T.* than to Lisa Litchfield's two aliens in her play. And surely the producers of *Man from Planet X* would be just as justified in suing Ms Litchfield as she could be in suing Spielberg.)

Meanwhile, Euro-dates for this movie of the year still look like being Christmas, though, the film has had its official British premiere at the recent Edinburgh festival... has begun playing the U.S. bases in Europe... and is due at the Deauville festival in France, where I'm off to in a matter of... oh, hours now.

But in a bizarre, not to say downright stupid move, the Swedish film censors and Committee on Children's Films have banned *E.T.* to children under the age of eleven. 'I'm used to censors being a trifle mad, but this is a totally incomprehensible ban.

Spielberg has rightfully retaliated by saying either his film is passed for children from seven upwards or he just won't allow it to be released in Sweden at all. Right on! The million dollar merchandising of *E.T.* has been spread between some 43 "quality" products so far in America. The take from everything from kids' shoes to female undies (eh?) is liable to rival another *Star Wars* record. Latest count on the Lucasfilm merchandising is 1.5 billion dollars!

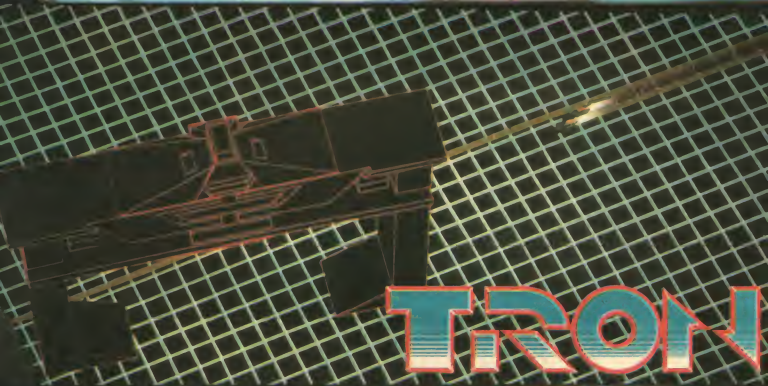
Proof of *E.T.*'s acceptance as a cine-classic is its swift (free) use in several American newspapers cartoons, such as Gary Trudeau's *Doonesbury* strip—and a six-panel political cartoon by syndicated Tom Toles which showed Israel's Premier Begin as *E.T.* playing with his pal Reagan's toy armaments. And the alien's movie (and telephone commercial) chapchase turns up on the tannoy of the hospital in *Young Doctors In Love* when, *M*A*S*H*-style we hear the announcement: "E.T. phone home."

While *E.T.* awaits its sequel, its main pal on planet earth, young Henry Thomas has been snapped up for another movie—*Misunderstood*. Director Jerry Schatzberg chose him to play Gene Hackman's son in this re-make of an Italian sob-story. Good role for the kid, though. Enough to make *E.T.* cry. O

E.T.

THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL
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Disney's latest multi-million dollar opus, *Tron*, has proved something of a failure in the usual Summer box office race in America. Exactly why is something of a mystery to me. Because *Tron*, simply and purely, is one of the most original movies of all time—a genuine *Fantasia* for the 80s.

Tron was first planned as a full-length animation feature by young director Steven Lisberger, of *Animalympics* fame. Somewhere along the line the production was picked up by Disney and the film turned from a relatively small budget affair into a mega-effects feature utilising the latest in computer-generated imaging and optical effects and animation techniques. The result, on the screen, is nothing short of dazzling.

Tron is the story of Flynn (Jeff Bridges) a computer whizz kid who has had several game programs stolen by a work mate, Dillinger (David Warner) while working for Encom, a computer house. Dillinger, on the strength of the success of one of the stolen programs, Space Paranoids, has risen up to the top of the company, while Flynn has turned to running an amusement arcade for his bread and butter. But Dillinger has become a victim of one of his own programs, The Master Control Program, which is now so intelligent that it intends to rule the world! Meanwhile, Flynn is trying to get access to the MCP to find the vital piece of information which will prove that he is the true creator of Space Paranoids. A couple of Encom employees, and friends of Flynn, Alan and Lora (Bruce Boxleitner and Cindy Morgan) help the wronged computerist break in to Encom so he can get direct access to the MCP. But the villainous MCP realises what he is up to and causes a laser to blast him into atoms and reform him inside the computer itself, where he is sentenced to die as a video game warrior.

Don't let this seemingly technical plot outline put you off *Tron*. It really is an action adventure story, which at times is at least as exciting as *Star Wars*, and certainly one hundred per cent more original than that space opera. Although the dialogue assumes that every member of the audience is likely to have at least a working knowledge of computer techno-jargon, there is actually very little dialogue in the film. Rather it is a feast for the eyes and ears (see it in Dolby stereo if at all possible!) and generates a kind of excitement and atmosphere quite new in the realms of cinema.

The acting is adequate for this type of movie, with special kudos going to Bridges. His disbelief at finding himself on a video gaming grid is played for laughs at first, but when he realises that he is likely to be blown away in the various games, it all turns a bit more serious and the actual battles ensure that any video game freaks who see it will probably never look at a vid screen the same way the next time they joggle a toggle in their favourite sleazeporium. David Warner, as usual, acquires himself well in the dual role of Dillinger and his video-game world alter ego, Sark.

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about *Tron*, is that a vast majority of what you see on the screen is actually created by computer technology. As one of the film's designers, Syd Mead, told me when he was recently in London, *Tron* virtually soaked up and used *all* the computer technology so far devised and even created quite a bit of its own. Some of the sequences are breathtaking. The Light Cycle race, in which the racing machines create solid walls of colour behind them as they speed around a grid, trying to cut each other off is absolutely extraordinary in its excitement and creates a true sense of cinematic exhilaration unlike anything you have seen. A game of electric frisbee in which combatants try and knock the floor out from under each other is likewise thrilling, and the sense of impending death is well handled.

Of course right wins in the end in *Tron* and the demise of the MCP, represented by a huge spinning face, is spectacular. Occasionally the film lapses into a kind of twoness, particularly in the death scenes of various video game players, and the ending in which the MCP is "cleansed", making the computer world a happier place reminded me of a cross between the death of the Blue Meanies in *Yellow Submarine* and the Ave Maria sequence from *Fantasia*. But overall, *Tron* is exciting and original in its concepts. A thoroughly "fresh" film experience and one I urge you not to miss.



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Above right:
Either a scene
from *Barry
Lyndon*, or a
candid photo of a
group of angry
Trekkies advanc-
ing on John
Brosnan's home.

During my three week vacation I wended around parts of Europe this summer I had intended to do some vital research on your behalf as well as the usual stuff like drinking a lot and lying in the sun. What I'd wanted to do was a kind of consumer survey of cinemas in different countries to see if foreign movie-goers had to put up with as much rubbish in the way of adverts and 'Barry Norman Visits Bognor'-type shorts.

That was the plan, at least, but I ended up only going to the cinema twice the whole time – once in Switzerland and once in Rome – and on both occasions the main feature had started by the time I entered the cinema (this in itself was very unusual compared to British cinemas – over here it doesn't matter how late you are, the adverts are always just starting as you enter the auditorium). So much for the consumer survey, but I did try...

An interesting thing about the cinema in Switzerland, called the *Georges V* and located in Lausanne, was a large display case set in the wall by the stairs leading up into the lobby containing nothing other than a copy of *Starburst* magazine. Hello, I said to myself, this is weird. Did they know I was coming or something? What's an English fantasy magazine doing being displayed outside a fancy cinema in Switzerland? It obviously had nothing to do with the movie being shown – which was Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*. Then I discovered that there was a cinema bookshop above the cinema and this was their display case. And on checking the shop later I found that they had a big range of back issues of *Starburst*, as well as other (inferior) magazines that shall remain nameless. Still, it was an odd coincidence.

Back to the subject of those adverts in British cinemas – they've been attracting a lot of flak in the trade magazine *Screen International* recently. One attack by film producer Euan Lloyd prompted a reply from a Pearl and Dean spokesman who said, in hurt tones: "Would it not be helpful if people like Euan Lloyd stopped attacking our 'archaic advertisements', which without effort on the industry's part, provides and annual income of some £4,000,000; this in turn provides the wherewithal to keep cinemas open for the exhibition of his films, and therefore to maintain his livelihood."

What the man from Pearl and Dean seems

to be saying is that because there are no longer enough people paying money to see *movies* in Britain the revenue from the adverts has become even more necessary in order to keep the cinemas open. But this completely side-steps the question of why less and less people are going to the cinema in this country. According to a recent issue of *Variety* the "... nosedive of British exhibition continued through May... as admissions dropped to 930,000 customers for the four week period, compared to 1,700,000 admissions for the like period one year earlier... Some trade predictions are that total 1982 admissions will be some 40% below 1981 totals... Forty percent below 1981, and yet 1981 was a record low in itself.

If the decline goes on at this rate it's going to take a hell of a lot more than the £4,000,000 advertising revenue to keep British cinemas open. And then the exhibitors are going to have to face reality and ask themselves why the cinema in this country is losing popularity while in countries like America and Australia this situation is in reverse. Can't be the movies – it has to be connected with the way movies are exhibited in Britain, and this brings us back to those "archaic advertisements" and all the other dross film patrons have to endure for their £2 to £3 a shot. If the exhibitors want to lure people away from their video recorders they're going to have to make going to the cinema a much more attractive proposition (when you hire a film on video you don't get 10 minutes of adverts with it...).

But the British Cinema Advertising Association is fighting back. They've just announced that a Marplan research survey proves that cinema advertising has more impact on consumers than tv advertising. This is all part of their campaign to prevent their clients from switching to the new Channel Four but while I admit that cinema adverts do have more impact than tv ones I hardly think this is a Good Thing. A *Variety* points out: "Report fails to note that a cinema patron is a 'captive' viewer, whereas the televisioner has more options at his disposal – namely switching channels." And he also has the choice of not going to the cinema and avoiding being that poor captive... which is what is happening. I guess the CAA will only wake up when the cinemas are completely empty. Sigh. Beam me up, Scotty ☺



Top and above: Two scenes from the BBC production of *Quatermass and the Pit*. Above right: Gregory Peck in *The Martian Chronicles*.

Science Fiction on the big and small screen has always been a touchy subject amongst hardened sci-fi buffs, who usually feel that, with the exception of *Star Trek*, most visual translations from their sacred literature are blasphemous. This thinking has in the past successfully led to rattle quite a number of competent science fiction films and tv shows.

But if cinema has occasionally averted face with films of the calibre of 2001 *A Space Odyssey*, why not tv? Looking back through the annals of British and American programmes there have been quite a number of failed sci shows and yet some do not owe their existence to an already well established novel.

Recent research has uncovered three tv series dealing with the subject of science fiction and yet all were totally different to each other and all total failures. The first appeared in 1979 amid a flurry of expectant publicity. Rather than a totally original idea, it was a reworking of an old theme in which the central character had already made three previous tv appearances - Professor Bernard Quatermass, created by sci writer Nigel Kneale.

Nigel Kneale is a most prolific author, whose tv credits have included *The Creature from the Hammer Films* made their 1958 film *The Abominable Snowman*, an adaptation of George Orwell's prophetic novel 1984, a film version of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, the screenplay for the Charles Schroeder film *First Men in the Moon* (1964) and original teleplays *The Year of the Sex Olympics* (1968), *The Stone Tapes* (1972) and the series *Beasts* (1978).

He is perhaps best known however, for his highly controversial and highly acclaimed Quatermass stories. They first appeared way back in 1953 and split the television and cinema worlds with *Quatermass and the Pit* in the starring role. The second in 1955 called *Quatermass II* starred John Robinson. By popular demand a third series appeared in 1958 entitled *Quatermass and the Pit* with Andre Morell. All three teleplays were turned into equally exciting motion pictures. Since the early sixties Kneale has left an urge to optomize the adventures of his famed scientist but it wasn't until 1973 that the opportunity arose to write a fourth script called simply *Quatermass*. The idea went, naturally, to the BBC, but although they wouldn't admit it, the idea was shelved due to lack of available finance to cover the special effects.

Kneale was approached by Euston Films (The Sweeney) where producer Ted Chittos was keen to see the idea transferred to film. As a way to prevent a film version being launched from his script at some later date, Kneale signed an contract with Euston Films to write a ported version for editing into a 30 minute film for release abroad. The tv series however was shown

in 4 one hour episodes, and on reflection was probably more enjoyable.

So where did Kneale go wrong with *Quatermass*? On character level it works reasonably well. John Mills is adequate as Quatermass and the story is intriguing. The plot revolves around a future civilisation (next year perhaps) where chaos reigns, the economy has collapsed and fuel in short supply. Gangs of youths roam the streets and the only people who seem to have any kind of employment are the technicians at a local television studio. Most of the younger generation who don't involve themselves with the increasing violence, belong to a gigantic "hippy" cult that believes the only way out of their depressing society is through teleportation to another planet.

Quatermass befriends a young scientist Dr Joseph Kapp played by Simon McCorkindale and his wife Barbara Kallerman. He lives in a country retreat resembling something out of Terry Nation's *Survivors* series. Quatermass and Kapp are suspicious of an unearthly occurrence at a huge stone circle, not unlike Stonehenge, where certain numbers of adolescents are obliterated by a blinding light from space.

As Kneale related in the excellent *Quatermass and the Pit* (being from another planet visited our world at the dawn of time burying huge teleportation devices under the ground. These instruments, centuries later, would be activated by just such youthful gongs-on, transporting anything caught in the beam and transforming it into a food substance for alien consumption). Quatermass dismisses the team's superstition. He has encouraged him to mark the areas where the machines are buried with stone circles, finally solving the archeological puzzle behind so many of the mystic sites dotted around the country. Needless to say he manages to beat the aliens at their own game by sending them an atomic breakfast.

The problem with the *Quatermass Conclusion* lies in its depressing overtones that heavily bog down the pace of the story. Simon McCorkindale is very disappointing and the series lacks no element of surprise so evident in the first *Quatermass* stories. The series looks well made and has some effective set pieces. It did cost 1.5 million pounds to produce, but it was unfortunately a sad reminder of just how superb the original series used to be. Other members of the cast included Brewster Mason, Margaret Tyzack and Ralph Arias. The director of photography was Ian Wilson and the Executive Producer was Verity Lambert, a lady who has had long dealings with science fiction, as any *Doctor Who* buff will tell you.

Another sf series, this time from America that tried to impress the viewers was *The Martian Chronicles* based on the novel by Ray Bradbury. Bradbury's unique work had been on the cards for a film version for years and yet no-one ever had a chance to tackle it. Finally television stepped in in the form of NBC in October 1977, 27 years after it was originally written. The series was produced by Charles Fries and adapted by Richard Matheson utilizing many of Bradbury's original story ideas. Both men were highly enthusiastic for the project but would ultimately be disappointed when the show paled in comparison to the blockbuster science fact series *Cosmos* with Carl Sagan. Fries gathered a distinguished cast to portray main characters in including Rock Hudson as Wilder, Fritz Weaver as Parsigne, Darren McGavin as Parkhill and Roddy McDowall as Father Stone.

The television series had a visual style unusual for sf, putting in a mind of the Roger Vadim classic *Berberia*. Rather than using all the short stories contained in Bradbury's novel, Fries and Matheson split the television concept in to three segments. The first relates how the Martians watch the Earthmen arriving in spacecrafts. In anger they murder the invaders and also turn the planet into a graveyard for the second expedition sent to the red planet. When the third NASA spaceship arrives with Colonel Wilder in charge he discovers the Martian cities in ruins and the race all but wiped out by Earth diseases. One of his men Capt Cooper is sent with a mysterious Martian weapon attacks the remaining crew but is killed by Wilder and Lt Parkhill.

In the second installment the story progresses a few years to a manned colonisation of the planet. One of the ghost-like surviving Martians assumes the identity of certain Earthpeople, creating a feeling of homophobia for the Martians. With the Martians population return home, but unfortunately never on Earth at a time of global conflict. Lt Parkhill pursued by Martian sandspies is deluged by the hospitality offered him by the spiritual Martian race, but saddened later when he is witness to the destruction of the Earth by nuclear holocaust.



In the third episode Wilder finally meets up with a Martian. Together with his family he destroys the books about life on Earth as his old planet now ceases to exist. They are now the Martians. Apart from an unusual musical score the series offered very little for Ray Bradbury the definitive screen version of his novel has still yet to be made.

Back in 1970 London Weekend Television launched a short lived science fiction series of their own entitled *The Adventurers of Don Quixote* starring Ian Handry, that lasted for six episodes. The stories were loosely based on the adventures of Don Quixote and his sidekick Sancho Panza. The show was aimed at the adult viewer and worked as a kind of satire. Don Quixote was a member of the Intergalactic Maintenance Squad and together with his fellow companion Sgt Sam Coopersen (Ronald Lacey) roamed the universe in his space capsule, occasionally landing on various planets and upsetting the delicate balance of humanity. The series was technically impressive looking and LWT constructed a giant spaceship at their Wembley Studios designed by Bryan Buge, Rodney Cammish and John Emery. Don Quixote was also one of the first shows to feature nudity, particularly in the episode *The Love Reflector*. To understand how the series looked, it might help if you can cast your mind back to the visual content of TV's *Star Maidens*. The series was never repeated and vanished from the face of the Earth, something that that character in the series was always unable to do.

Episodes included *The Benefits of Earth* by Peter Wildehood (Executive Producer for the series) in which Quixote after landing on a strange planet sees himself as a sort of roving ambassador of Earth. He has problems however when he encounters two warcs, one technically advanced though addicted to violence and human sacrifice, the other living in a dream world of peace and serenity. Director Mike Newell. Guest stars Anouska Hempel and Thelma Walters.

People isn't Everything, written by Kenneth Hill and directed by Quentin Lawrence. Quixote and Sam trustingly leave their spaceship in the charge of an alcoholic robot on the planet Ophichus. Guest stars Tom Bateman and Yvie O'Hara. *The Higher the Framer* by Peter Wildehood. Director Cliff Owen. This episode finds our anti-heroes on Maltepo 5, in the middle of a huge rubbish dump. The inhabitants have all taken refuge in 2,000 story skyscrapers. Guest stars James Hatcher and Hildagard Wolf.

The Love Reflector by Keith Miles. Director Cyril Cike. The population of the planet Herekos consists of beautiful girls but there is a danger in going in to their charms. One astronaut Quixote encounters succumbed a generation ago and is now only 6" tall. Guest star Frank Brock.

The Quixote and the Dead by Keith Miles. Directed by Bob Hind. Sgt Sam is convinced he is dead when by accident Quixote lands in the crater of a live volcano. Panic sets in when the intrepid astronauts discover that the volcano houses a strange assortment of ancient gods. Guest stars Patricia Haynes and Jacqueline Clarke.

Quixote and the Dead by Charlotte and Dennis Plimmer. Director Bill Turner. To anyone but Don Quixote, the planet Amity would seem a paradise. The girls are beautiful the vegetation is lush and both night and winter have been mysteriously abolished. But Quixote as usual cannot let well alone. Guest stars Kara Wilson and Roy Marsden.

doctor cyclops



Feature by Alan Murdoch

Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Dr Cyclops* is one of the great ignored science fiction horror films of the 1930s. It was ill-received by the critics of the time despite the ingenious special effects and use of Technicolor, almost unheard of at that time on such a low budget movie. It wasn't until the 1950s science fiction boom and Television came along that the film was appreciated by audiences and critics alike. On looking at the film today, with the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see why 1930s audiences couldn't get to grips with the picture. More than anything it resembles a movie from the middle of the fifties, science fiction movie boom. In common with many of those pictures it has the same basic cast/character structure (older paternal scientist, young hero, young heroine), which immediately brings to mind the characters in the much later *Them!*

The film opens with the shadow of the myopic Doctor Alexander Thorkel (Albert Dekker) on a rough-hewn brick wall. Thorkel is in his laboratory, working on a series of experiments to discover the effects of Radium on living creatures. Thorkel has an argument with his assistant over the morality of his experiments which climaxes with Thorkel killing the assistant. We switch scenes to New York and the offices of Dr Rupert Bullfinch (Charles Halton). Bullfinch has just received a communication from Thorkel which requests that he and a group of scientists join him in the Amazon jungle to assist in his experiments. Bullfinch is delighted with the invitation and sets off immediately, bringing with him a lovely young scientist, Mary Robinson (Janice Logan). On their journey Bullfinch and Mary secure the services of a effete chemical engineer, Bill Stockton (Tom Coley). Stockton is reluctant to join the expedition but is forced to due to financial considerations—he's broke! The three arrive at the village closest to the lab of Thorkel and try to hire a pack of mules. But the owner of the mules, Steve Baker (Victor Kilian), insists that he go along.

When the group arrives at the laboratory, Thorkel is dismissive and seems eager for his newly found colleagues to leave. But they insist on staying to find out what Thorkel is working on. They discover a mine shaft behind Thorkel's laboratory. Steve witnesses Thorkel winching a strange looking piece of apparatus out the shaft to make a few adjustments. After Thorkel is safely back inside, Steve gathers up a few pieces of rock from around the mouth of the shaft and returns to the others. They determine that the ore is Radium and begin to bicker among themselves over what to do with the discovery. Meanwhile in Thorkel's laboratory the crazed scientist is examining a tiny piebald horse, a mere seven inches tall.

Next morning, Thorkel again insists that they leave and that if they don't they will be in grave danger. Suddenly, there is the sound of a horse neighing and Thorkel wanders off to find the source of the noise. The others look on bemused as Thorkel prowls around in a patch of long grass, talking to some small animal that we can't see. Thorkel returns to his lab without a word and the scientists decide that they will break into the lab to discover exactly what Thorkel is up to. Unfortunately, Thorkel catches them in the act and blows his stack, threatening them with all kinds of nastiness. Then, strangely, he relents and offers to show them his work. Thorkel is drawing power from the Radium in the mine without having to extract a sliver of ore from the shaft. The energy is then used to power a shrinking ray. Thorkel manoeuvres ➤





his enemies into the shrinking chamber and turns on the ray. Needless to say, it works. When they wake up they find themselves in the cellar under Thorkel's lab. He toys with the miniature people for a while, then, tiring of his game, he promptly goes to sleep. The tiny scientists take their chance and escape into the yard outside, where they are menaced by giant chickens and a giant cat. Thorkel wakes up and begins to hunt his pets down with a large butterfly net. He catches Bulfinch and returns with him to the lab. He begins a series of tests on the tiny scientist and ends up by chloroforming him to death. The others escape into the jungle and attempt to float a canoe to take them to safety. But Thorkel soon catches up and brings them back to the lab. They escape once more and line a shotgun up with Thorkel's bed. Thorkel, meanwhile is dozing in a chair on the other side of the room. Bill manages to snatch Thorkel's glasses and break the lenses, then turns his attention to the spares Thorkel keeps in a drawer. Thorkel awakes and turns the lab upside down trying to catch his victims. The scientists escape to the mine and lure Thorkel out onto a plank that spans the mouth of the shaft. Thorkel loses his footing and plunges to his death at the bottom of the mine.

Actor Albert Dekker, who admirably portrayed the unhinged Dr Cyclops had been around Hollywood in undistinguished roles for years. Dr Cyclops was his only starring part in a career then spanned more than thirty years, from *Beau Geste* and *Dr Cyclops* in 1939 to Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969). Director Ernest B. Schoedsack was perhaps better known for the classic *King Kong* movie of 1933. Long a partner of Merian Cooper, Schoedsack was responsible for helming a vast array of movies including *Grass* (1926), *Chang* (1927), *Hound of Zaroff* (1932) and *Mighty Joe Young* (1949). Many of the special effects used in *Dr. Cyclops*, particularly the giant hand of Thorkel grasping the tiny form of Bulfinch, had their origins in *King Kong*.

Dr Cyclops designer, Hans Dreier (1884-1966), had been an art director in the German cinema who came to Hollywood before the war. He masterminded the sets and their giant-sized duplicates, which were used in conjunction with the scenes involving the shrunken scientists. Dreier also worked on such classics as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1931) and *Sunset Boulevard* (covered in depth in cinema 7).

When compared with its contemporaries, *Dr. Cyclops* is certainly a film that was ahead of its time. It was one of the first movies to use Radium in such a sinister role, pre-figuring the Atomic paranoia that was to follow in the giant insect pictures of the 1950s. More specifically, the idea of radioactive elements affecting the size of living objects was also to become a mainstay of fifties sf movie. The back-projection in the scenes involving the full-size Thorkel and the miniaturised scientists is convincing, especially when you consider that the film was in colour. However, Ernest Schoedsack had had plenty of practice in back-projection techniques during the filming of *King Kong*.

Dr Cyclops is a good deal better than film historians would lead one to believe. Even this author has been guilty of underestimating its quality (in the *Starburst Annual*, now on sale!) But having seen the picture again recently, I have to admit that I was thoroughly impressed. *Dr Cyclops* turns up very rarely on television, even more rarely on the specialist cinemas circuits. But should it happen to come your way, make the effort to see it. You won't be disappointed! ○





